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# A Troublesome Commerce: The Interstate Slave Trade, 1808-1840.

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A TROUBLESOME COMMERCE:  
THE INTERSTATE SLAVE TRADE, 1808-1840

VOLUME I

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

By  
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## Abstract

The interstate slave trade grew from a haphazard and intermittent enterprise in the early years of the nineteenth century to a central aspect of southern society. With the decline of the international trade and the decline of white migration to the frontier, southerners turned to the trade to supply their labor needs. Farmers in the Chesapeake region increasingly sold their “excess” bondservants to slave traders. These speculators brought a measure of systemization and regularity to the trade. As they did so, however, a significant number of Upper South citizens questioned the trade’s efficacy. The wanton exploitation and naked cruelty of speculation caused many to wonder if the trade was worth the price. Evangelical Christians, moreover, tended to abhor the interstate slave trade since it undermined the Biblical basis of the family and violated the idea of Christian stewardship. Citizens of the Lower South, on the other hand, were worried that they imported the worst type of slaves, therefore increasing the risk of rebellion. The slave trade, in essence, caused southerners to question the justification for the peculiar institution.

Speculators modified their practices to make slave trading more palatable to southern citizens. They promoted the idea that they bought slaves in family units, did not traffic in kidnapped slaves, and treated their purchases with a modicum of dignity. Traders separated themselves from the more objectionable portions of the trade by employing agents and actively promoting the idea that there were “good” and “bad” traders. At the same time speculators worked to rehabilitate their image, northern abolitionists became more strident in their attacks on slavery. One of their favorite targets was the slave trade. Southerners could hardly admit to the charges without

creating the opportunity for further criticism of slavery. Their doubts about the trade's efficacy disappeared as southerners began to blame abolitionists for slavery's excesses while simultaneously believing in a negative stereotype of the slave trader. In this manner, southerners effectively disregarded the abolitionist attacks while fashioning a justification for slavery that relied on blaming slave trader for the worst abuses of the peculiar institution.

## Chapter One

On April 27, 1846 Isaac Franklin died of “congestion of the stomach” on his plantation in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana. The family made arrangements to have the body preserved in alcohol and returned to his favorite plantation, Fairvue, in Sumner County, Tennessee. Franklin, fifty-seven years old at his death, owned six properties in Louisiana and the one in Tennessee. His entire estate, which included over 10,600 acres and seven hundred slaves, was valued at over a half a million dollars.<sup>1</sup> Franklin hoped to convert Fairvue into the “Isaac Franklin Institute,” an academy that would educate his daughter, nieces, nephews, and the poor children of the county.<sup>2</sup> A New Orleans paper praised Franklin’s “munificent provision” and hoped his generosity would inspire others. It noted that he displayed “perserverance and steadiness of purpose, and that address and tact, in the management of business, for which he became afterwards so remarkable.”<sup>3</sup> Another memoriam praised Franklin as a “man of discerning mind, sound judgment, great worth, indomitable spirit, and vast enterprise.” Had Franklin and his wife Adelia “lived in the remote times of early Greece and Rome, their fame would have descended to us, in the genius of the far-famed lyric

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<sup>1</sup> *Succession of Isaac Franklin* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 27-51, 293 (quotation), 482, 700-708. Franklin’s net worth was calculated by adding together the holdings of the several properties. One of Franklin’s plantations, Angola, is the present site of the state penitentiary.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 16. Franklin’s widow foiled his plans. She originally surrendered her claim to the estate in favor of a \$10,000 annual annuity, but successfully sued for its possession three years later (*Ibid.*, pp. 19, 714-18).

<sup>3</sup> *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 7 Oct. 1846.

poets.” The paper concluded that Franklin’s “tact, address, firmness, and intelligence” enabled him to succeed in his “peculiar calling.”<sup>4</sup>

Franklin’s “peculiar calling” was the interstate slave trade. Various known as “speculators,” “nigger traders,” or “soul drivers,” Franklin and others like him bought slaves in one state, transported them to another state, and sold them.<sup>5</sup> He teamed with John Armfield to build the largest slave trading firm on the continent. At its peak, the company sent ships from Alexandria, Virginia, to New Orleans and Natchez twice a month during the prime shipping season of October through March. They speculated on a massive scale, having \$250,000 in bills receivable after the 1831-32 trading season.<sup>6</sup> Armfield told a visitor that the firm had shipped about one thousand slaves in 1833, but expected the number to be “much greater” the next year. He expected “*their house* alone would ship at least eleven or twelve hundred” slaves to New Orleans and Natchez in 1834. Their slave jail in Natchez reputedly could hold between six hundred and eight hundred slaves at one time. In 1833 Franklin claimed he sold \$100,000 worth of slaves, which was “more negroes than all the other Traders together.”<sup>7</sup> The firm was so large

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<sup>4</sup> New Orleans *Daily Delta*, 19 Dec. 1849.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Jefferson, ed., *The Travels of William Wells Brown* (New York, 1991), pp. 39-43; John Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge, 1977), p. 504.

<sup>6</sup> Washington *Daily National Intelligencer*, 6 Nov. 1835; Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *Isaac Franklin: Slave Trader and Planter of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1938), pp. 36-44; Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 8 June 1832, Rice C. Ballard Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>7</sup> *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Mar. 1834, p. 39 (first quotation, emphasis in original); Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 25 Dec. 1833, Ballard Papers (second



that it weathered the radical swings of the slave market. Since most traders took out large loans to pay for bondservants at the beginning of the trading season, they could be especially vulnerable to economic slumps that caused defaults on credit. Franklin was not bragging when he told a fellow speculator that “I can get money where no other Trader can obtain a Dollar.” The sheer size of Franklin and Armfield’s operations enabled them to amass enough equity to cover expenses and reduce debt. During contractions in the slave market, they were in a position to expand their operations even as other traders faltered.<sup>8</sup>

Given the size and prominence of Franklin’s slave trading empire, it might seem unusual that neither of the newspaper stories mentioned his specific means of making a living. They did not describe him as a slave trader or mention slavery, as if Franklin was able to make his fortune through the sheer force of his personality. Even though slave trading was ubiquitous by the time of Franklin’s death, the men who speculated in slaves had become the subjects of a ridiculous stereotype, as had the trade itself. These stereotypes, however, served as a means of defense so that southerners did not have to face the brutal realization that slaves were everywhere in their society degraded, scorned, and oppressed. They were the means by which slaveholders separated themselves from the most objectionable portions of slavery. Southerners came to assume that slave trading was rare despite evidence to the contrary. When trading

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quotation); “Interview with Gen. W. T. Martin,” Frederic Bancroft Papers, Box 92, Southern Trip Notes (1902), vol. 3, p. 249, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, New York. It is likely that in this and the previous contexts that Franklin and Armfield were speaking of the sales involving themselves and their agents.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 18 Mar. 1834, Ballard Papers.

occurred, southerners attributed it to circumstances beyond their control. They blamed the slaves for being unmanageable, debt for being remorseless, traders for being greedy, and abolitionists for corrupting slaves by meddling where they did not belong. Crude stereotypes of speculators and the slave trade masked the fact that slaveholders themselves were primarily at fault for the degradation of bondservants.<sup>9</sup>

These stereotypes of the evil slave trader developed over time, just as attitudes towards speculators, the slave trade, and slavery changed. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was no consensus on the place of the slave trader in southern society because there was no agreement about the trade itself. There was much discussion of its efficacy, especially as it grew in scale and became more open in the years following the War of 1812. The increased visibility of traders who captured and sold free blacks or those slaves with a term of years to serve troubled many in the new republic. Others resented the notion that traders made money through speculation on slaves' misery. The scenes of bondservants upon the auction block clashed with the ideas of those southerners who imagined slavery to be a benevolent institution. Just as bad were the sights and sounds of traders' coffles headed south and west, especially when whites knew that the trade broke apart slave families in order to facilitate speculation. The growth of the interstate slave trade forced southerners to confront the

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, 1989), pp. 184-92. For the purposes of this study, a slave trader or speculator is a man who bought slaves in one state and sold them in another on a regular basis as the sole or principal source of his income. The terms slave trader, trader, and speculator will be used interchangeably. Obviously, others such as brokers, auctioneers, and commission merchants sold slaves, but were not primarily concerned with the interstate market. At times, slaveholders brought slaves into other states and sold them, but not as their principle or steady income.

meaning of slavery itself. What began as a genuine concern over the growth of slave trading, primarily in the Upper South and often found among evangelical Christians, eventually became the basis of the stereotype. Southerners, when confronted with evidence of the slave trade's brutality, managed to convert this challenge to slavery into a bastion of support for it.<sup>10</sup>

Perceptions of the slave trade, and reactions to it, varied over time and place. While coffles and family separations bothered many in the Upper South, those states that imported a significant number of slaves had other concerns. An increase in the number of slaves, citizens in these states believed, raised the specter of a powerful and restive slave population that might one day repeat the experience of Haiti.<sup>11</sup> Residents of the importing states complained that they received the castoffs and the worst slaves from the other states. They responded in various ways, such as trying to limit the importation of slaves, controlling the types of bondservants who crossed their borders, or creating strict rules for the conduct of all slaves. A significant number of masters in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana went to Virginia or Maryland on their own slave buying expeditions. Although their activities were virtually the same as commerce in

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<sup>10</sup> Coffles were the means by which traders forced their slaves to walk overland. Speculators normally handcuffed the males together in pairs, giving the appearance of a chain gang. Coffles are more fully described on pp. 29-30 of this study.

<sup>11</sup> Haiti, also called Santo Domingo or Saint Domingue, experienced a revolution in 1793. Free persons of color allied with slaves to overthrow the white aristocracy. Toussaint L'Overture emerged as the leader of the fledgling nation. Slaveholders in the southern states, for obvious reasons, did not want to duplicate the island's experience and passed laws forbidding white Haitian refugees to bring their slaves with them. (C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Overture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1963).

slaves, they drew a sharp distinction between themselves and speculators. Southerners in importing states used a stereotype to distance themselves from the trade and speculation. These stereotypes became a way to define the limits of slavery.<sup>12</sup>

Even as southern reactions to the slave trade varied, speculators changed their business practices in response to criticism. They distanced themselves from the seamier portions of their business, making both it and themselves more accepted in southern society. Speculators, in effect, created the idea that there were “good” and “bad” traders. All of slavery’s abuses could be blamed on “bad” traders. Even as speculators changed their tactics to make their business more palatable, the trade became the basis of repeated attacks by abolitionists, who tried to attack slavery at its weakest point. Speculators were a convenient target since they often committed heinous offenses. Beset from the outside, most southerners no longer questioned the interstate slave trade, but converted speculators into scapegoats as a means to avoid responsibility for the worst of slavery’s abuses. Ultimately, the need for the trade conquered most southerners’ qualms about the negative consequences of slavery.

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<sup>12</sup> This separation of states into “importing” and “exporting” is not a pure description. The routes of the interstate slave trade changed over time, so that while South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee originally were net importers of slaves, they became net exporters once the areas of the Southwest opened up. Also, Tennessee and Georgia had areas that imported slaves and other areas that exported slaves in the 1850s. The main idea is that the division between exporting and importing states moved south and west with the flow of migration (Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (1931; reprint, Columbia, S.C., 1996), pp. 382-406; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 11-12; Richard B. Lowe and Randolph B. Campbell, “The Slave-Breeding Hypothesis: A Demographic Comment on the ‘Buying’ and ‘Selling’ States,” *Journal of Southern History*, 42 (1976): 401-12).

Initially, most southerners gave little thought to slave traders since there was no organized interstate slave trade in the colonies that became the United States. Most slave transactions involved either local sales or, more noticeably, the importation of Africans. While the first known entry of Africans into Virginia occurred in 1619, a regular trade to mainland North America arose later that century. There were several reasons for this increase, including a high demand for labor, the difficulty in securing cheap and reliable white indentured servants, and the drop in the cost of imported Africans. Although it is not clear who initiated the practice, by the middle of the seventeenth century, merchants in Charleston virtually monopolized the trade, although regular shipments of slaves arrived in Savannah after the Seven Years' War.<sup>13</sup>

The African trade tended to discourage all but the wealthy, since it was capital intensive. A trader had to purchase the slaves, gather supplies, pay the captain and crew, and cover port fees before making a single sale. Men who wished to break into the trade normally needed access to a large sum of money before they began their

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<sup>13</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), p. 29; Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968); Russell Menard, "From Servant to Slaves: The Transformation of the Chesapeake Labor System," *Southern Studies*, 16 (1977): 355-90; Stephen Deyle, "'By farr the most profitable trade': Slave Trading in British Colonial America," *Slavery & Abolition*, 10 (1989): 107-25; Herbert S. Klein, "Slaves and Shipping in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 5 (1975): 383-412; Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge, 1981); David Richardson, "The British Slave Trade to Colonial South Carolina," *Slavery & Abolition*, 12 (1991): 125-72; Darold D. Wax, "'New Negroes are always in Demand': The Slave Trade in Eighteenth-Century Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 68 (1984): 193-220; Susan Westbury, "Slaves of Colonial Virginia: Where They Came From," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 42 (1985): 228-37.

operations. Once established, they could immediately plow the money from their sales back into the purchase of new slaves. Their activities often led to dividends for other citizens in port cities. The increased shipping trade provided employment for caulkers, mechanics, tradesmen, laborers, and clerical workers. Most colonists felt the trade was part of normal commercial activity and participation in it seemed to trouble few consciences. The importers of slaves enjoyed a privileged position in colonial society, serving as judges, councilmen, governors, and congressmen. Henry Laurens, for example, served as president of the Continental Congress despite his earlier connection to the African slave trade.<sup>14</sup>

Perceptions of slavery and the international trade began to change during the struggle for American independence. The increasing belief in natural rights raised troubling questions about liberty and slavery. Natural rights, in describing mankind as naturally free, argued strongly for an end to slavery, since the institution was antithetical to personal liberty. The growth of slavery, and the slave population, bothered enough colonists that they took action against the importation of Africans. Every colony with the exception of South Carolina had outlawed the trade before the

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<sup>14</sup> Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807* (Philadelphia, 1981); James G. Lydon, "New York and the Slave Trade, 1700 to 1774," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 35 (1978): 375-95; Darold D. Wax, "Negro Imports into Pennsylvania, 1720-1766," *Pennsylvania History*, 32 (1965): 254-87; Lorenzo J. Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620-1776* (New York, 1942), pp. 24-26, 68-71; Deyle, "'By farr the most profitable trade'," pp. 118-19; Daniel C. Littlefield, "Charleston and Internal Slave Redistribution," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 87 (1986): 93-94. Laurens himself began to have doubts about importing Africans and eventually severed his involvement with the trade (Donald L. Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics 1765-1820* (New York, 1971), p. 70).

war with England. These prohibitions came from a variety of motives, most of them unrelated to the interest of Africans. Ending the trade served as a form of economic blackmail against England, in the hopes that Parliament would make political concessions. Slaves, along with imported goods, became subject to embargo in the hopes of hurting English commerce. More importantly, the hostilities disrupted commerce of every sort, so formal prohibitions recognized the reality of a crippled trade. Pronouncements against the evil of the international trade were one way of seizing the moral high ground in order to win favor in European courts—but they had a hollow ring when few ships were sailing for any reason.<sup>15</sup>

The international slave trade resumed after 1783, but with less vigor than before. North American slaves were resilient enough to form communities and numerous enough to constitute a significant portion of the population. Slave labor became the cornerstone of southern agricultural production and proved important in the North as well. The presence of a slave community that grew through natural means meant less dependence on imports. Furthermore, enough revolutionary sentiment lingered in 1783 to ensure the inclusion of a constitutional provision allowing the prohibition of the international trade after twenty years. Congress then made it illegal for United States citizens to participate in such commerce. The ultimate goal, of course, was to abolish

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<sup>15</sup> Jordan, *White over Black*, pp. 269-311; David B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975), pp. 164-342; Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1961), pp. 33-50; Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Freedom: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago, 1967).

the African slave trade to the United States.<sup>16</sup> A mixture of sometimes contradictory motives and circumstances led to these attacks on the African trade. Some found the paradox of continuing to import slaves while championing the virtues of freedom too much to bear. The trade became a convenient target for Americans who wished to limit or eliminate slavery. Its distance from the lives of most people made it a perfect fit for those who desired to reign in slavery but were not willing to confront the institution directly. Others, who lived amid the slaves, hesitated to increase a population they did not trust and often feared. They trembled at the prospect of bringing in more Africans who might create a powerful slave community that could rise in rebellion. Such men reasoned that they could protect slavery by keeping the slaves under even tighter control. They assumed that newly enslaved Africans were more likely to fight for freedom than those born into bondage who were, presumably, accustomed to slavery. Finally, a number of Virginians realized that slave prices would probably rise upon the cessation of the international trade. Any cost increase would greatly benefit slaveholders in the Old Dominion, who could then sell their slaves for a higher price and rid themselves of what they perceived to be a potentially dangerous population. Whatever the motives, by the late eighteenth century, there is no doubt that most Americans opposed the African slave trade. This opposition, even if widespread, was shallow. The gradual decline of the international trade led to a change in the

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<sup>16</sup> Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, pp. 223-25; Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics*, pp. 297-99; Merton L. Dillon, *Slavery Attacked: Southern Slaves and their Allies, 1619-1865* (Baton Rouge, 1990), pp. 55-73; Steven Deyle, "The Irony of Liberty: Origins of the Domestic Slave Trade," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 12 (1992): 38-39.



perceptions of the men who continued to import Africans. They no longer had high political or social status, but inhabited the margins of society.<sup>17</sup>

Although the importation of Africans had generally fallen into disfavor by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the international trade was hardly a moribund institution. Approximately 93,000 slaves arrived in the United States between 1790 and 1810. Masters and would-be masters in the developing areas of the South and Southwest who wanted slaves for farming operations in the backcountry could find Africans readily available for sale.<sup>18</sup> The ban on participation in the trade by American citizens, though perhaps impressive on paper, was difficult to enforce. Individual states were hardly in a position to seal their coasts from fast sailing ships laden with slaves. The continual demand for laborers ensured that the African trade remained a fixture on southern coastlines. It was easier, and often cheaper, to buy Africans in Charleston and ship them to Savannah or New Orleans than to bring them from other regions of the United States. This market was so well developed that in 1803 South Carolina “shocked and outraged the rest of the nation” when it defiantly reopened its ports to the

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<sup>17</sup> David B. Davis, “American Slavery and the American Revolution,” in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville, 1983), pp. 262-80; Jordan, *White Over Black*, pp. 372-442; Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics*, pp. 79-80. See Deyle, “Irony of Liberty,” pp. 43-48; and Stephen Deyle, “The Domestic Slave Trade in America,” Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1995, pp. 33-44 for the assertion that some Virginians wanted to close the African trade in order to drive up the prices of domestic slaves.

<sup>18</sup> Philip D. Morgan, “Black Society in the Lowcountry 1760-1810,” in Berlin and Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom*, pp. 83-91; Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism* (Charlottesville, 1992), pp. 239-41; Allan Kulikoff, “Uprooted Peoples: Black Migrants in the Age of the American Revolution, 1790-1820,” in Berlin and Hoffman, eds., *Slavery and Freedom*, pp. 143-71.

importation of Africans. When the state had prohibited the trade in 1787, the legislature fractured along sectional lines. The low country, which generally had as many slaves as it needed, voted for suspension, while the developing areas of the upcountry desired to continue the trade. The situation repeated itself in 1803, except that there were now enough votes to push through the legislation. Citizens who flocked to the upcountry and needed cheap labor combined with Charleston merchants who made profits from the reshipment of slaves.<sup>19</sup> With the threat of a Congressional prohibition looming in 1807, traders increased their importation of slaves. Visitors to Charleston noticed the large numbers of Africans in the city and a glut of slaving vessels in the harbor. The sudden surge in slave labor drove down prices so much that at one point traders kept Africans on the ships in the hopes of creating an artificial shortage. At least 39,000 slaves entered the state between 1803 and 1807, a number almost twice as great as any other five-year span in the colonial or post-revolutionary eras.<sup>20</sup>

In spite of this steady influx of Africans, the internal movement of slaves within the United States increased. Over half of the nation's slaves lived in Maryland and

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<sup>19</sup> Davis, "American Slavery and the American Revolution," p. 267 (quotation); Morgan, "Black Society in the Lowcountry," pp. 83-141; Patrick S. Brady, "The Slave Trade and Sectionalism in South Carolina, 1787-1808," *Journal of Southern History*, 38 (1972): 601-20.

<sup>20</sup> Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, pp. 308-9; Kulikoff, "Uprooted Peoples," p. 146; John Lambert, *Travels through Lower Canada and the United States of North America*, 2 vol. (London, 1810), 2: 405-6. South Carolina imported nearly 90,000 Africans between 1782 and 1810. Southerners had another source of slave labor: the sale of slaves from the northern states, most of which were dismantling the institution of slavery. The number of slaves attained in this manner was small (Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, "Philanthropy at Bargain Prices: Notes on the Economics of Gradual Emancipation," *The Journal of Legal Studies*, 3 (1974): 377-401).

Virginia, and it was the Chesapeake slaves who provided much of the back-breaking labor that was vital in the west. With the tobacco market's collapse, more and more slave owners in Virginia and Maryland sought opportunity elsewhere. In the twenty years after George Washington's election as president, the owners of some 75,000 Chesapeake slaves compelled them to walk to the expanding regions of Kentucky and Tennessee. Georgia and South Carolina, states that were opening new lands to settlement, also received a significant number of slaves. Advertisements for runaway slaves in Georgia show an increase in masters seeking to recover Virginia-born bondservants. This apparent growth suggests an increase in the movement of Chesapeake slaves into Georgia. Most of the slaves forced to march westward or southward, however, accompanied their masters rather than a slave trader.<sup>21</sup> Those whites who made it to the edge of settlement wanted to raise a crop that would produce quick economic dividends. Cotton was the most popular choice, especially after the development and spread of the cotton gin. The labor intensive nature of cotton cultivation meant that slaves were in high demand in developing areas. Even though masters brought a significant number of bondservants with them, there were not enough slaves to satisfy their demands or the desires of those who had already settled.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Kulikoff, *Agrarian Origins*, 230-45; Kulikoff, "Uprooted Peoples," pp. 147-51; Deyle, "Irony of Liberty," pp. 57-61; Deyle, "Domestic Slave Trade," pp. 59-68; Lorena S. Walsh, "Slave Life, Slave Society, and Tobacco Production in the Tidewater Chesapeake, 1620-1820," in Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville, 1993), pp. 192-93.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Turner Censer, "Southwestern Migration among North Carolina Planter Families: 'The Disposition to Emigrate,'" *Journal of Southern History*, 57 (1991): 407-

One of the results of this persistent demand was the development of an interstate slave trade. Although muted by the importation of Africans and the migration of planters, the trade grew in strength at the end of the eighteenth century. The shift in the Chesapeake from tobacco production to the raising of grain, a less labor-intensive enterprise, meant that farmers needed fewer slaves. Those masters who stayed behind could sell their "excess" slaves to a small but growing group of slave traders. There is evidence of a small trade from Virginia and Maryland to Kentucky and Tennessee. In 1795 a speculator announced his intention to bring slaves to Knoxville, informing the public of his intention to carry on "the Business, Extensively." Other traders drove a handful of slaves to Nashville.<sup>23</sup> A southern route out of the Chesapeake also developed. In 1799 a man named Speers purchased slaves in Virginia, intending to bring them to Georgia, but the bondservants killed him and his assistant during the march. Around the same time an anonymous buyer in Richmond advertised for twelve to fifteen boys ranging in age from seven to fifteen years. That he promised to pay cash for the slaves is a good indication that he was an interstate trader.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, Charles

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26; Joyce E. Chaplin, "Creating a Cotton South in Georgia and South Carolina, 1760-1815," *Journal of Southern History*, 57 (1991): 299-315.

<sup>23</sup> Chase C. Mooney, *Slavery in Tennessee* (Bloomington, Ind., 1957), p. 39 (quotation); John R. Commons, et al. eds., *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, vol. 2, *Plantation and Frontier Documents*, Ulrich B. Phillips, ed. (Cleveland, 1910), pp. 55-56; Anita S. Goodstein, "Black History on the Nashville Frontier, 1780-1810," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 38 (1979): 403-6.

<sup>24</sup> Phillips, ed., *Plantation and Frontier Documents*, 2:70-71; Richmond *Enquirer*, 1 Feb. 1805. Speers was acting on behalf of James Simms, who had borrowed \$10,000 dollars from the Georgia treasury. It is unclear whether Speers was a professional slave trader or if he was allied with Simms in an elaborate swindle.

Ball, a former slave, recalled that when his master died, a Georgia trader bought Ball's mother, while Carolina slave dealers purchased his brothers and sisters. Ball remembered seeing coffles leaving the nation's capital while he worked in the Washington naval yards. Then in 1805, "Colonel M'Griffin," a slave trader, purchased Ball and forced him to walk from Maryland to South Carolina.<sup>25</sup> Coffles leaving the District of Columbia were frequent enough that an 1802 grand jury in Alexandria complained of the "practice of persons coming from distant parts of the United States into this District for the purposes of purchasing slaves." The sight of slaves "loaded with chains as though they had committed some heinous offence against our laws" pained the local residents.<sup>26</sup> John Springs III supplemented the income from his Springfield plantation in South Carolina by purchasing slaves in Maryland and Virginia and selling them to his neighbors. He had begun by 1806 and continued his speculations for thirty years.<sup>27</sup>

While Springs was clearly involved in the interstate trade and Ball's tragic experience is straightforward, the interstate slave trade before 1815 was small. During

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man* (1837; reprint, New York, 1969), pp. 16-21, 28, 36-50, 66-80, 86-95. More information on the circumstances involving Ball's account is found in Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony*, pp. xxiii-xxvi.

<sup>26</sup> *Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States*, Twentieth Congress, Second Session, 7 Jan. 1829 (Washington, 1854), p. 177 (quotation); *Alexandria Phenix Gazette*, 22 June 1827.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Tadmán, "The Hidden History of Slave Trading in Antebellum South Carolina: John Springs III and Other 'Gentlemen dealing in Slaves'," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 97 (1996): 6-29. Springs purchased from twenty to forty slaves per trip.

this time, most of the slave sales involved private transactions on a local level rather than the use of a professional slave trader. Slave owners rarely sold more than a few slaves at a time, and most of the larger sales involved the settlement of estates.<sup>28</sup> This private market was significant enough to provide much the South's labor demand and arrange for the transportation of slaves across interstate lines. William Grimes, a slave who eventually escaped to freedom, experienced the tribulations of the local slave market. Looking back on his life, Grimes described how he had belonged to six different owners before he ran away. Despite moving from King George County, Virginia, to Savannah, Georgia, a slave trader did not buy Grimes. Instead, he changed hands as a result of private transactions. It was only when Grimes's last owner contemplated selling him to a speculator that the slave ran away.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, it is difficult to clearly distinguish between slaves who were part of the interstate trade and those who migrated with their master. In the *Virginia Gazette and Independent Chronicle* of 1787, for example, Moses F. Austin of Richmond advertised that he wanted to buy one hundred slaves. He specified that they must be from twenty to thirty years old, "Hearty and well made," and warned that they would be sent out of state. At

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<sup>28</sup> Kulikoff, *Agrarian Origins*, pp. 228-29; Deyle, "Irony of Liberty," pp. 60-62; Deyle, "Domestic Slave Trade," pp. 63-64; Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, pp. 19-22. Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 12-19, makes the case for the "possibility of a substantial pre-1808 domestic slave trade" (quotation on p. 19). For an intensive look at the numbers of slaves involved in probate sales, albeit for a later time period, see Thomas David Russell, "Sale Day in Antebellum South Carolina: Slavery, Law, Economy and Court Supervised Sales," Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1993.

<sup>29</sup> Arna Bontemps, ed., *Five Black Lives: The Autobiographies of Venture Smith, James Mars, William Grimes, the Rev. G. W. Offley, James L. Smith* (Middletown, Conn., 1971), pp. 62-65, 77-78, 83-83, 94, 104.

first glance it appears that Austin was an interstate trader, a man who bought slaves and then transported them for resale. It is doubtful, however, that he would have considered himself as such. Speculators tended to buy younger slaves, especially those between fifteen and twenty-five. Moreover, Austin was a commission merchant in Richmond from 1784 to 1789, so it is misleading to label him a slave trader. In this case, he probably was making the arrangements on behalf of a planter who lived out of state or for someone who planned to move further south. While the slaves were probably intended for interstate transportation, Austin does not appear to have been an interstate trader.<sup>30</sup>

Even as the internal slave trade increased, the federal government took action to stop the importation of African slaves. In December of 1802 President Thomas Jefferson advised Congress to start discussion of legislation that would end the international trade. Most observers agreed that such a measure would pass, but there was much wrangling over the specific shape of the law. One point of disagreement revolved around what to do with those slaves confiscated from smugglers. Another bone of contention involved the question of appropriate penalties, that is, whether jail time would be sufficient or if the death penalty needed to be invoked. As might be

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<sup>30</sup> Austin's advertisement is quoted in Robert McColley, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia* (Champaign, 1964), pp. 164-65; Deyle, "Domestic Slave Trade," p. 63; and Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, p. 15. All three cite the advertisement as evidence that Austin was an interstate trader. Austin himself left no evidence that he ever moved slaves across state lines (David B. Gracy, *Moses Austin: His Life* (San Antonio, 1987), pp. 22-52). Tadman establishes the tendency of traders to concentrate in younger slaves (Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, p. 25). It made no difference to the slaves, obviously, whether Austin was a trader or not. They were torn from their family and friends and forced to move to another state.

expected, both issues became the subjects of compromise. Congress avoided making any disposition regarding captured slaves. Each state had to decide what to do with Africans captured off its shores. Penalties for smuggling were equally vague. It became a “high misdemeanor,” with the possibility of a fine for offenders.<sup>31</sup> Most southerners supported the suppression of the international trade, but there was division over the issue. Planters in the backcountry of Georgia and South Carolina generally desired more slave labor, so they opposed federal intervention. Many immigrants to the southwestern frontier also opposed the measure because it was difficult to acquire slaves in this area and stopping the flow of Africans would probably raise prices. The rest of the South, not being as dependent on the trade, stigmatized the importation of Africans and desired to put an end to the traffic.<sup>32</sup>

While the debate regarding the international trade remained civil, discussion of the internal movement of slaves started a quarrel in the House of Representatives. Things at first moved along quietly, but then Peter Early of Georgia realized that the language of the House bill could be applied to the coastwise trade, that is, the

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<sup>31</sup> The federal government executed one American for his involvement in the African trade. See James A. Rawley, “Captain Nathaniel Gordon: The only American executed for violating the Slave Trade Laws,” *Civil War History*, 39 (1993): 216-24.

<sup>32</sup> Ronald T. Takaki, *A Pro-Slavery Crusade: The Agitation to Reopen the African Slave Trade* (New York, 1971), pp. 3-4; W. E. Burghardt Dubois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* (1896; reprint 1965, Baton Rouge); Stephen J. Goldfarb, “An Inquiry into the Politics of the Prohibition of the International Slave Trade,” *Agricultural History*, 68 (1994): 20-34; Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, pp. 119-36; Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, pp. 50-72; Duncan J. MacLeod, *Slavery, Race and the American Revolution* (New York, 1977), pp. 35-46; Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics*, pp. 324-42; Kulikoff, *Agrarian Origins*, pp. 233-36.



movement of slaves among the ports of the seaboard. It was common for slave owners to transport their slaves in this manner. Late in the session, Early introduced a measure to ensure that nothing in the act would forbid the “taking on board or transporting” those slaves legally held in the United States “in any vessel or species of craft whatever” from one state to another. He sought to uphold the freedom of southerners to move their slaves from state to state. The House passed the amendment, but the Senate balked at the idea. The upper house thought it necessary to regulate the legitimate coastwise shipment of slaves, lest smuggling from Florida, at that time a Spanish possession, become rampant. Detection of large ships would be much easier than finding small ones, especially if, as the Senate proposed, they carried a manifest from the collector of the port of departure describing each slave on board. The Senate proposed to prohibit small vessels from transporting slaves from state to state. When the Senate finished with the bill and sent it back, David R. Williams of South Carolina moved that the House insist on its version of the bill. Loss of this point, he argued, would mean “no negroes shall be transported from one State to another to be sold or held in service.” Williams feared that control over the coastwise trade would lead to regulation of the interstate slave trade and restrictions on white migrants who brought slaves across state lines. Only eleven members voted for William’s motion. John Randolph then angrily asserted that if the Senate version passed, the South would defy the entire law. Sensing a conspiracy, Randolph pledged to take his slaves from state to state, so that he might assert “the rights of slaveholders,” even if it meant breaking the

law. His extreme argument frightened many House members, leading to a conference committee to iron out the differences in the two bills.<sup>33</sup>

When the committee lowered the tonnage requirement to forty tons, both Early and Randolph were furious and renewed their attack. They saw such meddling with the coastwise trade as the first step in regulating slavery in the South. If the federal government could limit the movement of slaves to a particular type of vessel, then it could outlaw slave migration altogether. Early pessimistically predicted that smuggling would be rampant. Randolph feared that since the bill involved the regulation of private property, it could become the pretext for universal emancipation. He wanted to do away with the tonnage requirement for the ships. In a stern lecture to the House, Randolph warned that the southern states had a “deep stake” in “arresting the invasion of their rights.” Having no requirement meant that there would be no grounds for further meddling in slavery and signal the federal government’s inability to regulate the peculiar institution. In his characteristic hyperbole, Randolph declared that he would rather lose all the other bills since the establishment of the United States government than see this bill passed. He predicted the measure would “blow up the Constitution in ruins.” Despite Randolph’s bluster, a motion to accept the conference report passed sixty-three to forty-nine. He did not give up but, made a desperate, last-ditch effort to change it. The next day he gave an “animated speech” that protested the forty ton

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<sup>33</sup> *Debates and Proceedings*, Ninth Congress, Second Session, 12 Feb. 1807, pp. 483-85; 18 Feb. 1807, pp. 527-28. There is no record of the Senate debate. The amendment is inferred from the reaction of the representatives and from the final language of the act. See sections eight and nine of the act, in *Ibid.*, Ninth Congress, Second Session, 2 Mar. 1807, pp. 1269-70.

regulation. Randolph contended that the bill gave Congress a power it did not possess, a right “subversive of the rights of property in the holders of slaves” which might lead to general emancipation. Again, he proposed to allow any vessel to carry slaves, a change that would have stripped the bill of all effectiveness in preventing smuggling. He also proposed an explanatory act, one that would bind the federal government from interfering in the rights of masters over their slaves. Randolph threatened to lead Virginia’s congressional delegation to President Jefferson’s house to urge a veto if his demands went unfulfilled. Again, he failed, as the House refused to reconsider the measure. Randolph did not carry out his threat and the measure became law.<sup>34</sup>

The bill, in effect, was the first piece of federal legislation that regulated the interstate slave trade. In proscribing certain vessels from carrying slaves from one state to another, Congress asserted its ability to control a means of transportation that would become increasingly important for the movement of bondservants. Furthermore, few southerners were concerned with this assertion of power. As might be expected, northern representatives generally supported the bill, although New York had a significant number who voted against the provision.<sup>35</sup> Only three southern members spoke out against the provisions regarding the coastwise trade, and did so for differing reasons. Randolph made it clear that he opposed the measure more for the precedent it set in regulating slavery than for any interference with an interstate trade. He wanted to

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Ninth Congress, Second Session, 26 Feb. 1807, pp. 626-27 and 27 Feb. 1807, pp. 636-38; *National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, 2 Mar. 1807; Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics*, pp. 336-38.

<sup>35</sup> The vote was 10-6 in favor of the bill among the New York representatives.

protect the right of southerners to bring slaves into new territories, something a growing number of Virginia citizens desired because of the worsening condition of the state's agriculture and the lure of cheap land to the south and west. Randolph convinced all but one of the Virginia representatives to vote against the measure.<sup>36</sup> Early and Williams, on the other hand, tried to defend the coastwise trade in slaves. They represented two areas—Charleston and Savannah—that profited from the trade and strove to conserve an important economic interest. The representatives from South Carolina and Georgia voted unanimously against the bill. Significantly, the other states most affected by the movement of slaves, whether by migration or sale, split almost evenly on the issue. Representatives from Maryland, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee voted eleven to ten for the bill.<sup>37</sup> This close vote suggests that southerners in Congress did not heed the arguments of Randolph, Early, and Williams. They gave little thought to how the regulation of interstate shipping could affect the internal movement of slaves. Those states not directly involved in the coastwise transportation of slaves did not find it important to safeguard this traffic. The vote that outlawed the importation of Africans shows a South divided over the issue of regulating the internal movement of slaves. There was no consensus on the place of the internal slave trade because it was of minor importance to most southerners.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See also Randolph's later explanation in *Debates and Proceedings*, Fourteenth Congress, First Session, 1 Mar. 1816, pp. 1115-16.

<sup>37</sup> The individual votes were Maryland 4-4, North Carolina 4-4, Kentucky 1-2, and Tennessee 2-0. There were no votes from Delaware representatives.

<sup>38</sup> Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics*, pp. 336-38 characterizes the vote as purely sectional in nature.

When President Jefferson signed the bill outlawing the African trade, the United States still depended on imported Africans to supply much of its burgeoning labor need. As the government wrested more land from Native Americans and made it available for settlement, the demand for slaves continued to increase. The weakly written law had little support where violations were most likely to occur, so traders continued to bring Africans into the country. They did so with impunity since the puny United States Navy had little hope of mounting enough patrols to deter illegal activity. Furthermore, the provision giving states discretion in handling captured slaves only served to make state governments accomplices in the importation of Africans.<sup>39</sup> Africans continued to come into the country, with from 7,000 to 10,000 arriving in the ten years after 1810. Smuggling most likely provided Louisiana with the bulk of its new slaves during this decade. Only after the passage of stricter enforcement measures during James Monroe's administration and Britain's enforcement of the Atlantic slave trade did the flow of African slaves to the United States virtually cease.<sup>40</sup>

The slow suffocation of the international trade altered the flow of slaves within the country's borders. When southerners who moved to the rapidly expanding cotton areas of the Southwest could no longer count on buying newly enslaved Africans, they

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<sup>39</sup> The Georgia state government, for instance, advertised the auction of 30 to 40 "prime African slaves" illegally imported (*Savannah Republican*, 26 Mar. 1819).

<sup>40</sup> David Eltis, "The Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Slave Trade: An Annual Time Series of Imports into the Americas broken down by Region," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 67 (1987): 135; Joe G. Taylor, "The Foreign Slave Trade in Louisiana after 1808," *Louisiana History*, 1 (1960): 37-39; Kulikoff, *Agrarian Origins*, pp. 232-35; Kulikoff, "Uprooted Peoples," pp. 150-52; Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics*, pp. 340-46.

looked to the Chesapeake and, in so doing, fed the development of the interstate slave trade. The men who became slave traders during this time were much different from the transatlantic traders of the mid-eighteenth century. It took little capital to break into the interstate slave trade because there were fewer expenses. The greatest cost was the initial purchase of slaves, and many traders overcame this obstacle by borrowing money. Some participants in the trade did so on a part-time basis and often sold other goods, as well. Such individuals were either auctioneers who handled the division of estates or merchants who supplemented their income by arranging slave sales.

Interstate speculators, in contrast, were generally itinerant. They had no fixed depots for the buying or selling of slaves but roved about the countryside, buying a few slaves from different owners or purchasing them at auctions. When they acquired enough bondservants, traders marched their chattel south and sold them to whoever happened to be at hand. A few established themselves in a town and bought slaves from that area. John Stannard, for instance, remained in Fredericksburg, Virginia, long enough to publicize his desire to buy “likely” slaves. He was the exception, however, as most traders preferred not to advertise their presence. Moreover, before the 1820s, it is unusual to find the advertisement of a slave trader in southern newspapers. Most notices for slaves were for the sale rather than the purchase of bondservants, and the vast majority involved private individuals rather than professional slave traders.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Fredericksburg *Virginia Herald*, 12 Sept. 1810 (quotation); Deyle, “Domestic Slave Trade,” pp. 66-68. For examples of slaves offered for sale, see Annapolis *Maryland Gazette & Political Intelligencer*, 18 Mar. 1810, 16 Jan. 1811; and Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, pp. 19-25.

The outbreak of war in 1812 interrupted development of the nascent internal slave trade by limiting commerce of all types and reducing migration to the frontier. More importantly, the British took possession of slaves in Maryland and Virginia during their invasion of the Chesapeake. The Americans accused several British officers of taking slaves to the West Indies for sale. While few Chesapeake bondservants actually ended up in the markets of the Caribbean, a total of 3,000 to 5,000 slaves left the area as a result of the war. With so many slaves and slaveholders affected, Virginia passed legislation for the compensation of owners whose bondservants ran away, were executed, or were transported out of state. The United States also insisted that England compensate American slaveholders for the loss of their property.<sup>42</sup> After the war, Eliza Fromentin surveyed the situation in the Chesapeake. Writing from the western shore of Maryland, he observed that slave prices were quite high, as the “number of negroes carried away by the British during the late war has contributed not a little to raise the value of the negroes who are left behind.” The wartime loss of slaves and the heavy demand in the developing areas of the South caused a sharp increase in slave prices in the years immediately following the War of 1812.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> “Estimates of the Value of Slaves, 1815,” *American Historical Review*, 19 (1914): 813-38; *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 15 Jan. 1814, p. 330; Frank A. Cassell, “Slaves of the Chesapeake Bay Area and the War of 1812,” *Journal of Negro History*, 47 (April 1972): 144-55. The Treaty of Ghent specified that Americans who lost slaves could file claims with the British government.

<sup>43</sup> Eliza Fromentin to John McDonough, John McDonough Letters, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

These high slave prices came despite the languid state of the Chesapeake's agriculture. Even as the demand for slave labor diminished in Maryland and Virginia, it grew phenomenally in other areas of the South. Newly available lands in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana were an irresistible lure to migrants. The high labor demand of cotton meant that settlers there naturally looked to slavery to supply their labor needs rather than hire white labor. This combination of circumstances meant that masters in the Chesapeake were more likely to part with their bondservants than ever before.<sup>44</sup> A British traveler surmised that many residents of the Upper South found it "more profitable to breed slaves for the market, than to raise the appropriate produce of the soil." While owners did not have to resort to breeding since slaves had children of their own volition, it was apparent that slaveholders were increasingly willing to sell their slaves to interstate traders.<sup>45</sup> By 1820, about a third of all slave migrants moved south with professional slave traders and the ratio increased throughout the decade.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Censer, "Southwestern Migration," pp. 407-26; Chaplin, "Creating a Cotton South," pp. 171-200; James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York, 1982), pp. 69-95.

<sup>45</sup> Adam Hodgson, *Letters from North America, written during a Tour in the United States and Canada*, 2 vol., (London, 1824), 2: 194; Adam Hodgson, *Remarks during a Journey through North America in the Years 1819, 1820, and 1821* (New York: 1823), p. 178. The question of whether Virginia and Maryland agriculture was in a state of decline is a contentious issue. What is clear, is that it was changing. Owners in this area were emigrating in greater numbers than before, while those who stayed behind were more willing to sell their "excess" slaves. For a recent interpretation of the era, see William G. Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion: Virginia and the Second Party System 1824-1861* (Charlottesville, 1996).

<sup>46</sup> The estimate of the movement of slaves is taken from Kulikoff, *Agrarian Origins*, pp. 241-42. For a higher figure, see Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 25-31, 245-47.



The interstate slave trade was becoming more noticeable in southern society. Whereas a few years earlier it was sporadic, unorganized, and uncommon, through the 1820s the trade became regular, organized, and ubiquitous. As more coffles headed south, most observers agreed that by 1817 that the “trade has greatly increased with the last two or three years.” Slave trading emerged as a vocation in its own right instead of being a part-time means of earning extra money. An increasing number of men became traders and it was during the 1820s that most of the prominent antebellum speculators starting selling slaves.<sup>47</sup>

The advertisements of Chesapeake newspapers clearly reflected the growth of the interstate slave trade. Before 1815, virtually all of the notices dealing with slave sales were for one or two slaves and interested parties were asked to “Inquire of the Printer.” For instance, someone offered up for sale three slaves sold “for no fault” and only because of “want of employment.” They were “mostly brought up in the country...and are not corrupted by town habits.” More importantly, advertisements by someone who would pay cash for large numbers of slaves, a sure sign of trading activity, were absent.<sup>48</sup> The situation changed, however, within a few years. Advertisements plainly showed the presence of a significant trade by 1820. Henry

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<sup>47</sup> *Niles' Weekly Register*, 19 July 1817, p. 323 (quotation); Deposition of Francis Scott Key, 22 Apr. 1816, Select Committee to Inquire into the Existence of an Inhuman and Illegal Traffic in Slaves...in the District of Columbia, HR 14A-C.17.4, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Morris Birkbeck, *Notes on a Journey in America* (1818; reprint, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1966), p. 21. See also the *Liberator's* conclusion that “Up to the year 1820, it would seem that the slave trade, which has since been so vigorously carried on between the north-eastern and south-western slave states, was hardly known” (*Liberator*, 20 Mar. 1838, p. 62).

<sup>48</sup> *Annapolis Maryland Gazette*, 4 Mar., 21 Aug., 12 Sept. (quotation) 1810.

Robertson, for instance, promised to give “the highest prices” for slaves between twelve and twenty-five years of age. Other traders advertised that they would pay “CASH FOR NEGROES” and give a liberal price when they made purchases.<sup>49</sup> Even as they specified the type of slaves, speculators during this time often informed the public how many slaves they wanted to buy. Most commonly, they asked for anywhere from ten to twenty-five young slaves.

Traders often established a temporary headquarters in the local tavern, although they sometimes stayed in a hotel. In Easton, Maryland, Austin Woolfolk rented space in Mrs. Green’s Tavern, but Joseph Woolfolk used Lowe’s Tavern, and other traders were in Union Tavern and Nabb’s Tavern.<sup>50</sup> In the Washington area, the taverns got so full during the trading season that owners devoted specific rooms to keeping slaves. They became so crowded that patrons hardly had space to sleep on the floor. The Bell Tavern in Richmond became notorious for having speculators fill up its beds and for holding auctions at its front door. The men who bought the tavern in 1835 did so despite the “merited and invidious character universally imputed to it.”<sup>51</sup> Traders

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 25 July 1822 (first quotation); Baltimore *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser*, 4 May 1815 (second quotation).

<sup>50</sup> For Austin Woolfolk, see Easton *Republican Star & General Advertiser*, 2 Jan. 1821, 9 Oct. 1827, 17 June 1828. For Joseph Woolfolk, see Ibid., 12 Apr. 1825, 9 Oct. 1827, 17 June 1828. For Union Tavern, see Ibid., 16 Jan., 22 Feb., 31 July 1821; 28 May 1822. For Nabb’s Tavern, see Ibid., 17 July 1821. Traders were also at the Fountain Inn (Ibid., 17 Apr. 1821, 7 May 1822).

<sup>51</sup> Jesse Torrey, *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States* (1817; reprint, St. Clair Shores, Mich., 1970), pp. 41–42; Richmond *Enquirer*, 10 July 1835 (quotation). The new owners of the Bell Tavern pledged to use “untiring perseverance and judicious arrangement to counteract the prevailing prejudices, and afford comfort and satisfaction.” Lewis Collier located his slave jail near the tavern, “where the sales

stayed in taverns while in Baltimore, Annapolis, Alexandria, Washington, Fredericksburg, Norfolk, and Lexington.<sup>52</sup> Speculators also made frequent use of the Queen Anne's County jails in Maryland and the federal jails in Washington.<sup>53</sup> As speculators roomed in hotels and rented space in local jails, they brought the interstate trade in contact with more and more people. Speculation was moving out of the periphery of southern society and into the mainstream.

Austin Woolfolk was one of these early interstate traders. In late 1815 he traveled to Maryland and advertised that he would pay "a liberal cash price" for slaves.<sup>54</sup> Once he purchased enough bondservants, Woolfolk drove them to his home state of Georgia in a coffle.<sup>55</sup> Speculators like Woolfolk normally handcuffed the male

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of slaves are generally made." (Ibid., 23 Aug. 1833). For evidence of traders staying at the Bell Tavern, see Ibid., 8 June 1821. They also stayed at the Washington Tavern (Ibid., 14 July 1820, 8 June 1821).

<sup>52</sup> Baltimore *American*, 18 Mar., 27 Mar., 22 Apr., 2 Sept. 1815, 2 July 1817, 25 Sept. 1822, 21 July 1823, 1 June 1824, 19 Jan. 1825; Annapolis *Maryland Gazette*, 29 Aug, 5 Sept. 1822; Alexandria *Phenix Gazette*, 1 Mar., 5 Apr. 1825; Washington *National Intelligencer*, 16 Sept. 1826, 28 May 1827, 4 June 1828; Fredericksburg *Virginia Herald*, 2 Sept. 1816, 20 Sept. 1817, 28 Feb. 1818, 16 Aug. 1820, 2 Mar. 1822, 17 Sept. 1823; Norfolk *American Beacon & Commercial Diary*, 9 July 1816, 7 Mar., 3 July, 17 Nov. 1817; Lexington *Intelligencer*, 4 Sept. 1830.

<sup>53</sup> Undated Baltimore *American*, as quoted in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Mar. 1822, p. 442.

<sup>54</sup> Baltimore *American*, 25 Dec. 1815. See Ibid., 24 May 1816, 19 June 1816, and 11 Aug. 1816 for more of his advertisements. For background on Woolfolk, see William Calderhead, "The Role of the Professional Slave Trader in a Slave Economy: Austin Woolfolk, a Case Study," *Civil War History*, 23 (1977): 195-211; Dickson J. Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass: The Maryland Years* (Baltimore, 1980), pp. 76-80; and Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, pp. 39-44.

<sup>55</sup> Baltimore *American*, 12 July 1816.

slaves together in pairs and passed a long chain or rope through all of the manacles to keep them together, much like fish on a stringer. As an added precaution, they often forced bondservants to sleep in their manacles. Reasoning that females and children were less likely to run away, speculators allowed them to trudge unchained behind the men. Those too young, old, or feeble to walk rode in the supply wagon. A speculator or one of his armed assistants followed the procession on horseback to make sure the slaves did not try to escape.<sup>56</sup> Once the coffle went far enough south where the speculator thought the risk of escape was minimal, he unshackled the slaves. He did so, presumably, to speed up the march. One slave remembered how the trader who purchased him kept the coffle in chains until it crossed the South Carolina border. Before paying a smith, the trader told the slaves to “give up all hope” of returning to their homes because it would be impossible for them to find their way back.<sup>57</sup>

Woolfolk’s slaves marched along a well-traveled course that became known as the “upper route.” It passed through Washington, Fredericksburg, Richmond, and Columbia, South Carolina, before stopping in Hamburg, South Carolina, just across the Savannah River from Augusta, Georgia. Augusta had long been connected with the

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<sup>56</sup> For contemporary descriptions of slave coffles, see Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony*, pp. 704-6; *Western Luminary*, 23 Nov. 1831; George W. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion through the Slave States, from Washington on the Potomac to the Frontier of Mexico* (1844; reprint, New York, 1968), pp. 36-37; Henry C. Knight, *Letters from the South and West* (Boston, 1824), pp. 78-79; F. Nash Boney, ed., *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave* (Savannah, 1972), p. 16; Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, p. 29; Richard Puryear to Isaac Jarratt, 3 Mar. 1834, Jarratt Puryear Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>57</sup> Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, p. 38.

trade in slaves; traders sold Africans there as late as 1806. Moreover, the federal road that stretched westward from the city gave it the advantage of being easy to reach for Georgia residents. The Hamburg-Augusta area therefore emerged as the center of this southern interstate slave trade by 1820.<sup>58</sup> Traders who brought slaves down the upper route found it safer and easier to stop in Hamburg. There, they waited for prospective buyers to cross the Savannah River, since an 1816 Georgia law prohibited “the introduction of slaves into this state by negro traders for speculation.” Migrants to Georgia and state residents, however, could bring slaves into the state as long as they did not sell them within one year of the bondservant’s entry date.<sup>59</sup> The purpose of the law was to reduce slave speculation in Georgia and prevent the entry of undesirable slaves. It just shifted the point of sale to the other side of the river, however, since a bridge and three ferries connected Augusta with Hamburg. Local residents knew how readily Georgia’s citizens evaded the spirit of the law. One remarked that “an agent may bring to the very borders of the state, a slave for a [Georgia] citizen, & that it is only necessary for the owner to lose a few days to meet his agent at the Savannah river”

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<sup>58</sup> Fredericksburg *Virginia Herald*, 15 May 1817; Donnie D. Bellamy and Diane E. Walker, “Slaveholding in Antebellum Augusta and Richmond County, Georgia,” *Phylon*, 48 (1987): 172; Avery Craven, *The Coming of the Civil War* (Chicago, 1957), p. 105.

<sup>59</sup> *Savannah Republican*, 11 Jan. 1817 (quotation); Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 1 Jan. 1817; *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia* (Milledgeville, 1816), p. 8; Ralph B. Flanders, *Plantation Slavery in Georgia* (Chapel Hill, 1933), pp. 183-84; Ruth Scarborough, *The Opposition to Slavery in Georgia prior to 1860* (Nashville, 1933), p. 113. This law, and similar ones in other states, will be discussed in Chapter Four.

in order to bring slaves lawfully into the state.<sup>60</sup> Georgians may have found it comforting to believe that they were introducing slaves into their state rather than allowing the slave trader to do so. Traders were gaining a reputation for underhanded business practices, so buying slaves in South Carolina and bringing them into Georgia was one way to rationalize the trade's growth. Georgia residents could convince themselves they were picking out the "better" slaves and leaving the rest to be dumped in South Carolina.

Once traders reached Hamburg, they halted their coffles, pitched their tents near the bridge, and prepared their slaves for sale. One traveler who stumbled across an encampment of speculators reported that he saw up to 300 slaves waiting to cross into Georgia.<sup>61</sup> Woolfolk had an advantage over the other traders in this encampment. He was a native of the area, so once he arrived he turned the slaves over to his relative, John Woolfolk, who then sold them. John, who also handled arrangements for rental property, let Augusta residents know that he had "Prime Young Negroes FOR SALE, At the foot of the Bridge, South Carolina side, consisting of Men, Women, Boys, and Girls." Sellers like Woolfolk let it be known that they had lots of twenty to forty Virginia born slaves for sale.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 27 Oct. 1818.

<sup>61</sup> Undated *West Jersey Gazette*, as reprinted in *Nashville Whig*, 19 Feb. 1817.

<sup>62</sup> *Augusta Chronicle & Georgia Gazette*, 17 May, 23 Aug. (quotation), 1 Oct. 1821, 24 Jan., 21 Feb. 1822, 26, 30 June 1824. August and John were most likely brothers, but there is no direct documentation to confirm this surmise.

Slave owners in the Augusta area and beyond eagerly bought bondservants who had walked from Virginia and Maryland. It is possible to examine their buying habits for the years surrounding 1820 since the state law that called for the prohibition of slave traders also established a system of record keeping to deter such men. All slave owners, whether Georgia residents or not, were required to register their slaves with the clerk of court once they entered the state. The clerk duly recorded the owner, the person transporting the slaves (if different from the owner), the number of slaves, their names, and their ages.<sup>63</sup> The slaves recorded in the Richmond County books are a combination of those brought by owners migrating to Georgia or beyond and those purchased in the Hamburg slave encampment. Even though it is impossible to distinguish between the two groups, an examination of the data gives insight into the activities of southern slaveholders.

Purchasers and migrants clearly preferred young bondservants who would be the most productive and profitable once they reached the farm. Eighty percent of the slaves who entered Richmond County between 1818 and 1824 were under the age of twenty-six, while forty-five percent were less than fourteen. The high number of young slaves is not surprising, especially since forty-four percent of the slaves in the Upper South in 1820 were less than fourteen. Slaves aged fourteen to twenty-five, however, entered

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<sup>63</sup> The record books containing this information for Camden, Columbia, Elbert, Franklin, Jackson, Morgan, Oglethorpe, Pulaski, Richmond, and Wilkes Counties are in the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia. The books for Richmond County are the most extensive, probably because most of the slaves who entered Georgia came through the county. The sample under examination here runs from January 1818 to December 1824. The months from November 1821 to October 1822, however, are missing. Thus there are records for seventy-two of the eighty-four

Richmond County in numbers greater than their population. Just over one-quarter of slaves in the Upper South were of that age, compared to thirty-five percent of the bondservants entering the county. As might be expected, slaves older than twenty-five years were not in high demand. About twenty percent of slaves who entered the county were this age, compared with thirty percent of the bondservants in the Upper South. Males who entered Richmond County outnumbered females, but only in a slightly greater proportion than the Upper South's population.<sup>64</sup> Tables One and Two contain the exact population figures.

**Table One**  
**Slave Population of the Exporting States, 1820**

	0-13	14-25	26-44	45+	Total
Male					
Number	256,227	146,218	119,144	59,557	581,146
Male					
Percentage	22.6	12.9	10.5	5.3	51.3
Female					
Number	241,478	144,037	111,570	55,430	552,515
Female					
Percentage	21.3	12.7	9.8	4.9	48.7
Total					
Number	497,705	290,255	230,714	114,987	1,133,661
Total					
Percentage	43.9	25.6	20.3	10.2	

Source: Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, 1989), p. 241.

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months in the time period. The records of the other counties were too sporadic to constitute a reliable sample.

<sup>64</sup> The fairly equal ratio of male to female slaves is in stark contrast to the African trade, where there was a decided preference for young male slaves (Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, p. 101).



**Table Two**  
**Slave Population Imported into Richmond County, 1818-1824**

	0-13	14-25	26-44	45+	Total
Male					
Number	1,984	1,478	630	217	4,309
Male					
Percentage	24.5	18.3	7.8	2.7	53.2
Female					
Number	1,639	1,356	608	188	3,791
Female					
Percentage	20.2	16.7	7.5	2.3	46.8
Total					
Number	3,623	2,834	1,238	405	8,100
Total					
Percentage	44.7	35.0	15.3	5.0	

Source: Richmond County Slave Record Books, 1818-1824, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia (excluding November 1821 to October 1822).

Not only was there selective purchase, but the sales followed a seasonal pattern, as well. February and March were, far and away, the two busiest months, with over forty percent of slaves being registered in these two months. In fact, nearly three-quarters of all slaves entered the county between November and March. Entry of bondservants was barely noticeable for the rest of the year. This pattern suggests that white southerners shrewdly calculated when to buy slaves. There does not appear to be an unusually high number of males slaves purchased during harvest months, which indicates planters did not buy bondservants in reaction to a short-term labor need. At the time most slaves entered the county, planters had finished marketing their crops and were assessing their labor needs for the next year. Those who decided to expand their operations had ready cash with which to make down payments on slaves. They financed the remaining purchase price often over the course of one or more years. Migration was also more prevalent this time of the year since farmers could market one

last crop in order to have money for expenses. Table Three presents the seasonal structure of slave importation into Richmond County.

**Table Three**  
**Slave Population Imported into Richmond County,**  
**1818-1824, by month**

	Male Number	Male Percent	Female Number	Female Percent	Total Number	Total Percent
Jan.	580	7.2	502	6.2	1,082	13.4
Feb.	822	10.1	713	8.8	1,535	19.0
Mar.	899	11.1	809	10.0	1,708	21.1
Apr.	356	4.4	329	4.1	685	8.5
May	188	2.3	143	5.1	331	4.0
June	135	1.7	121	1.5	256	3.2
July	53	0.7	47	0.6	100	1.2
Aug.	83	1.0	79	1.0	162	2.0
Sept.	96	1.2	88	1.1	184	2.3
Oct.	267	3.3	227	2.8	494	6.1
Nov.	439	5.4	397	4.9	836	10.3
Dec.	391	4.8	336	4.1	727	9.0
Total	4,309	53.2	3,791	46.8	8,100	

Source: Richmond County Slave Record Books, 1818-1824, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia (excluding November 1821 to October 1822).

The pattern of the entry of slaves into Richmond County is similar to the pattern of slave trading that has been posited for other areas of the South. For instance, New Orleans imported virtually no slaves from July to October, but received over ninety percent between November and April. The pattern for New Orleans may have been more pronounced because of the necessity to prevent disease. June through October was the peak time for yellow fever in lower Louisiana, and most traders cut slave prices in late spring to make quick sales and reduce the risk of an epidemic.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Herman F. Freudenberger and Jonathan B. Pritchett, "The Domestic United States Slave Trade: New Evidence," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 21 (1991):

Even as the march of slaves exhibited a seasonal pattern, the number who entered Georgia steadily decreased over time. Fewer migrants journeyed south after most of the state's good land came under cultivation. The entry of slaves in Richmond County diminished as the demand for labor leveled off. Bondservants entering the county dropped steadily from 1818 to 1824. Owners registered almost 2,600 slaves in 1818, compared to barely over six hundred in 1824. Certainly some of the decline is due to less emphasis on keeping up with the necessary paperwork. As time passed, there was probably less desire to enforce the registration provisions. The pattern of entry, however, does correspond with the broad changes in movement, both white and black, in the South as a whole. Table Four contains the yearly totals of slaves registered in Richmond County.

**Table Four**  
**Slave Population Imported into Richmond County,**  
**1818-1824, by year**

	1818	1819	1820	1821 <sup>*</sup>	1822 <sup>**</sup>	1823	1824	Total
Total slaves	2591	1434	1347	882	200	1038	608	8,100

<sup>\*</sup>January through October

<sup>\*\*</sup>November through December

Source: Richmond County Slave Record Books, 1818-1824, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, Georgia.

As the amount of available land in Georgia declined, white migrants sought opportunity elsewhere. They moved in increasing numbers to a stretch of land across

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463-67; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 70-71; Laurence J. Kotlikoff, "The Structure of Slave Prices in New Orleans, 1804-1862," *Economic Inquiry*, 17 (1979): 498.

Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, an area that would become known as the Black Belt because of the dark color of the soil and, eventually, the concentration of slaves. Land in the Black Belt was durable, fertile, ideally suited to cotton, often close to excellent water navigation, and cheap. The frequent pressure on Native Americans to give up their lands, and the almost constant Indian Wars, coincided with the desire for more land and more slaves. When Andrew Jackson defeated the Creek Indians in 1814, they ceded their lands to the federal government and opened up large expanses of territory for white settlement. The Southwest became the most desirable location for white migrants by the mid 1820s.<sup>66</sup>

The demand for slaves in the Southwest fed the growth of the internal slave trade. Virginia and Maryland, with their large supply of slaves, became the natural source of labor. Settlers in developing areas wanted slaves, so Natchez and New Orleans emerged as the two major termini of the interstate slave trade. Even before the major shift of migration away from Georgia, an “extensive Slave-trade” between Natchez “and those western parts of the States of Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas, and Georgia” began to develop. Migrants moving from Virginia reported seeing slave traders headed west with their purchases.<sup>67</sup> Coffles, which usually numbered about thirty, became more numerous on the roads of western Virginia. As John Palmer made

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<sup>66</sup> A. A. Taylor, “The Movement of Negroes from the East to the Gulf States from 1830 to 1850,” *Journal of Negro History*, 8 (1923): 367-83; Censer, “Southwestern Migration,” pp. 407-26; Chaplin, “Creating a Cotton South,” pp. 171-200.

<sup>67</sup> Hodgson, *Remarks during a Journey*, pp. 178-79 (quotation); Hodgson, *Letters from North America*, 2: 194-95.

his way through Virginia, he stopped at a plantation near Lexington. It was a hot Sunday in August when a drove of slaves arrived at the plantation. A single trader who had come from Baltimore was in charge of the procession, and he stopped to ask the planter for lodgings that night. The planter gave his permission, so the speculator sent the slaves to the barn, where they slept in chains. Palmer was surprised to find the trader, a Louisiana resident on his way home, to be “communicative and intelligent.” This coffle, like most of the others that passed that way, walked to Nashville and then turned southwest onto the federal road to Natchez.<sup>68</sup> Just as the presence of speculators and their slaves in taverns and jails acquainted more people with the interstate trade, coffles made slave trading more visible. Travelers were known to curse the coffles because of their brutality and for taking up valuable space on the roads.<sup>69</sup> The sudden surge in the number of coffles presented a dim view of slavery and challenged perceptions of the peculiar institution. Southerners, especially non-slaveholders, had more consistent and graphic reminders of slavery’s cruelty.

One of the enterprising men who transported slaves to Natchez was Francis E. Rives of Petersburg, Virginia. Rives joined with Peyton Mason, Sr. and Peyton Mason, Jr. to form a slave trading cooperative in 1817. The three men signed an agreement specifying they would split the profit in equal portions and be bound equally for the

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<sup>68</sup> John Palmer, *Journal of Travels in the United States of North America, and in Lower Canada, performed in the Year 1817* (London, 1818), pp. 142-44 (quotation on p. 144); Francis Hall, *Travels in Canada, and the United States, in 1816 and 1817* (London, 1818), p. 357.

<sup>69</sup> “John Owen’s Journal of his Removal from Virginia to Alabama in 1818,” *Publications of the Southern History Association*, 1 (1897): 93.

cash used to purchase the slaves. Although rudimentary by later standards, the agreement was effective enough to get the men started in the slave trading business.<sup>70</sup> The members took turns escorting a total of four coffles before quitting the trade in 1823. Prior to each journey, all three purchased slaves in the vicinity of Petersburg and Norfolk. They then housed the slaves in local jails, paying fees to the jailers. Once they assembled about twenty-five slaves, the partners bought horses, wagons, and food for the journey. They also packed a set of clothes for each slave to wear upon arrival in Natchez. Only one of the partners escorted the slaves to the Southwest. Each coffle left in December so that it would arrive during the peak buying season. Although it is unclear how long it took Rives and the Masons to reach their destination, coffles normally averaged about twenty-five miles a day. Traders who spent “7 weekes on the Road” between Richmond and Natchez were elated about having a short trip, since most traveled longer than that depending on their starting destination, the weather, and the condition of the roads.<sup>71</sup> Most traders carried food in their wagons, although some

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<sup>70</sup> The agreement is in Francis Everod Rives Papers, Duke. For other examples of other partnership agreements, see “articles of association” between Tyre Glen and Isaac Jarratt, 13 Nov. 1831; and “articles of agreement” between Glen and William G. Norton, 6 June 1836, Tyre Glen Papers, Duke. More information on Rives may be found in Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 196-97 and Joel D. Trese, ed., *Biographical Directory of the American Congress 1774-1996* (Alexandria, Vir., 1997), p. 1763.

<sup>71</sup> James A. Mitchell to ? Mitchell, 12 Dec. 1834, Southside Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia (quotation). The traveling time of coffles is discussed in Ethan A. Andrews, *Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States* (Boston, 1836), p. 149; Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, p. 285-88; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, p. 77; Charles Sackett Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi* (New York, 1933), p. 149; and Freudenberger and Pritchett, “Domestic Slave Trade,” p. 472.

stopped at inns, farms, or foraged for comestibles. In any case, a large amount of food was necessary, since slaves who marched overland ate “ravenously.”<sup>72</sup>

In their pursuit of profit in the early republic, Rives and the Masons dealt with several difficulties. During their second journey, someone stole their horses in the “indian nation.” On another occasion they had to take back a slave on account of his being diseased. A buyer returned another bondservant the next year, the slave “being subject to fits.” When they could not sell “an old woman,” they gave her to a slave dealer in Natchez who bought seventeen other slaves. These unforeseen circumstances cut into the profit margin of the group, since they did not recoup any of their investment on these three slaves. Although the records show the firm netted just over \$9,000 on the first trip, that figure is deceiving since the members later had to refund money for two of the slaves. Profit for the second trip totaled just over \$770. The final two expeditions were hardly more profitable and barely worth the trouble for the men. They spent nine years trying to collect their debts, and likely quit the trade because of the hassle. Rives, at least, moved on to more stable ventures like banking and railroads.<sup>73</sup>

Driving coffles on foot was not the only way to transport slaves from the Chesapeake to the Southwest. Other traders marched their slaves to the western end of Virginia and then loaded them on flatboats for a voyage down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to Natchez or New Orleans. Wheeling, Virginia, was a common embarkation

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<sup>72</sup> William Beverley to Robert Beverley, 3 Dec. 1830, Beverley Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. Beverley, who was not a slave trader, was describing his experience in moving his slaves from Virginia to Alabama.

<sup>73</sup> The quotations and the financial figures are from the trading book in the Francis Everod Rives Papers.

point. Benjamin Lundy recalled that after 1815, the town became the “great thoroughfare of the slave-trade between Virginia and the Southern and Southwestern States.”<sup>74</sup> Other speculators bought slaves in Kentucky and Tennessee before loading them on flatboats. In either case, traders allowed the slaves, up to seventy-five on a boat, to roam the deck during the trip. If the vessel needed to dock at shore for wood or other provisions, the speculator chained the slaves together in pairs to prevent their escape. Traders sometimes sold slaves during such stops.<sup>75</sup> One traveler learned that young men could “make fortunes by slave-trafficking. They purchase all they can obtain, thrust them into prison for safe-keeping, drive them handcuffed through the country, like cattle, and boat them down the river.”<sup>76</sup> Isaac Franklin got his start on this route. As a teenager Franklin transported his brothers’ produce to New Orleans, and while in Louisiana he witnessed several slave transactions. Franklin began selling bondservants by 1810, but his service in the War of 1812 halted any efforts to establish himself in the slave trade. After the war, the twenty-six year old Franklin became a full-time speculator, most likely buying slaves in his home state and transporting them downriver to Natchez where he sold them.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Samuel Joseph May, *Some Recollections of our Anti-Slavery Conflict* (Boston, 1869), p. 12.

<sup>75</sup> Jefferson, ed., *William Wells Brown*, pp. 40-43; *Lexington Kentucky Gazette*, 29 Sept. 1826; *Woodville Republican*, 12 Dec. 1835.

<sup>76</sup> Knight, *Letters from the South and West*, pp. 101-2.

<sup>77</sup> *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 7 Oct. 1846; Slave sale receipts dated 6 May 1809, 30 Dec. 1809, and 29 May 1810 in David Weeks and Family Papers, Louisiana State University; *Succession of Isaac Franklin*, pp. 277, 283, 287.



Franklin brought slaves to Natchez just as that city's slave market emerged as one of the most important in the United States. A visitor described the scene in 1817. He stood at the brow of the two hundred-foot cliff overlooking the waterfront and was amazed to see fourteen flatboats of slaves docked there. The bondservants, the majority of them women, "were dressed up to the best advantage, on the same principle that jockeys do horses upon sale."<sup>78</sup> Some traders sold their slaves right from the boats, but most led their slaves up the steep climb from "Natchez under the Hill." The bondservants hiked "in a long straggling line, or sometimes in double files in well ordered procession." They all carried a bundle, possibly new clothes, oftentimes balancing it on their heads.<sup>79</sup> Traders kept their slaves in the town's center until 1833, when the city passed an ordinance forcing jails outside of the city limits. Most speculators moved to an area that became known as the Forks in the Road or Niggerville, a small cluster of buildings a few miles from Natchez. The trade, whether in town or at the forks, was "brisk and profitable."<sup>80</sup> This thriving business attracted numerous traders, including John M. Hundley, who advertised in 1822 that he "has just

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<sup>78</sup> Henry B. Fearon, *Sketches of America: A Narrative of a Journey of Five Thousand Miles through the Eastern and Western States of America* (London, 1818), p. 270.

<sup>79</sup> Joseph H. Ingraham, *The South-West by a Yankee*, 2 vol. (1835; reprint, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1966) 2: 235-47 (quotation on p. 240).

<sup>80</sup> *Natchez Mississippi Journal and Natchez Advertiser*, 19 Mar. 1833; Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, pp. 300-1; Estwick Evans, *A Pedestrious Tour of Four Thousand Miles, through the Western States and Territories during the Winter and Spring of 1818* (Concord, 1818), p. 213 (quotation). He also noted that slaves were "a subject of continual speculation, and are daily brought, together with other live stock, from Kentucky and other places to the Natches and New Orleans market" (pp. 213-14).

landed 50 Young Negroes, *Consisting of Men, Women & Boys*, from Maryland & Virginia, & from Kentucky.”<sup>81</sup> The trade to Natchez was becoming thickly contested, meaning more competition and fewer profits for all involved. Just as importantly, the surge in slave trading had its mark on society in the area. The great influx in slaves fueled white fears of a revolt or a race war. Mississippi, and the other states that imported large numbers of slaves, struggled with how to cope with the pervasive sense of unease.

New Orleans became a major center of slave trading activity as well. It was only when the coastwise trade became prominent in the mid 1820s that the New Orleans slave market became a major destination for speculators. Moving bondservants on the waterways was a more efficient way to deliver them to the Deep South. While this method was more expensive than an overland journey, it offered numerous advantages, including a reduced risk of escape, less strain on the slaves, a quicker trip, and a faster time from purchase to resale.<sup>82</sup> Woolfolk was one of the first slave traders to make extensive use of the coastwise trade, but men such as Franklin and Armfield, Abner Robinson, William Fulcher, Joseph Isnard, Edwin Lee, David Anderson, and Bartholomew Accinelly competed for a share of the New Orleans market.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Natchez Mississippi Republican*, 10 Nov. 1818, 9 Jan. 1822, 24 Oct. 1822 (quotation, emphasis in original); *Natchez Mississippi State Gazette*, 23 Feb. 1822, 18 June 1823.

<sup>82</sup> Freudenberg and Pritchett, “Domestic Slave Trade,” pp. 472-75 contains an analysis of the relative costs for transporting slaves.

<sup>83</sup> That these men were slave traders is evident from the frequent appearance in U. S. Customs Service Records, Port of New Orleans, Louisiana, Inward Slave Manifests, Microfilm at Louisiana State University. See also advertisements in the New

The coastwise trade also enabled the slave traders to expand the size of their operations since they did not have to accompany the slaves on board the vessel and could safely ship more slaves at once than they could escort in a coffle. The federal law of 1816 had the unintentional effect of safeguarding the purchases of slave traders. It stipulated that all slaves shipped in the coastal waters be described by name, sex, and height. The captain then became responsible for the bondservants until arrival at the port of destination. Speculators arranged for someone to meet the ship at the dock, take charge of the slaves, and sell them on the local market.<sup>84</sup> These techniques enabled Woolfolk to become a major slave trader. Instead of asking for fifteen to twenty slaves to go to the Georgia market, he notified the public in 1821 that he would pay the highest prices in "United States' money, gold or silver" for "*One hundred likely young Negroes*" who would be shipped to New Orleans. Ten years later he wanted three hundred slaves.<sup>85</sup> It is unlikely that he actually wanted to buy three hundred slaves at one time, but the exaggerated number was a device to attract attention. By all accounts, Woolfolk and his relatives were successful in their efforts to expand their slave trading

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Orleans *Louisiana Advertiser*, 3 Jan., 5 May 1826, 9 Dec. 1828; New Orleans *Courier*, 19 Mar., 16 Nov. 1825, 13 Jan. 1827.

<sup>84</sup> Charles H. Wesley, "Manifests of Slave Shipments along the Waterways, 1808-1864," *Journal of Negro History*, 27 (1942): 155-74 discusses the statutes involving the coastwise trade.

<sup>85</sup> Easton *Republican Star*, 2 Jan. 1821 (quotation, emphasis in original); *Cambridge Chronicle*, 1 Oct. 1836 as quoted in Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, p. 40. The progression of Woolfolk's purchases may be traced in his advertisements in the *Baltimore American*, 25 Dec. 1815, 24 May 1816, 12 July 1817, 7 Jan. 1824, 15 Feb. 1825; Easton *Republican Star*, 2 Jan. 1821, 10 Sept. 1822. Woolfolk's demands for the number of slaves are in line with those of other traders in Maryland.

operations, at least during the 1820s. Instead of being “born slave-traders” they were acute businessmen who made themselves into the preeminent slave-trading firm in Maryland. Customs Manifests reveal that they consistently sent shipments of forty or more slaves to New Orleans several times a year. By the middle of the 1820s, Austin and his family dominated the trade out of Maryland, sending, according to one estimate, 2,288 slaves to Louisiana between 1819 and 1832. The Woolfolks handled so much of the Maryland trade that the name Woolfolk became symbolic of the slave trade. Frederick Douglass recalled that slaves on Maryland’s Eastern Shore equated being “sold to Woldfolk [sic]” with banishment to the Deep South.<sup>86</sup>

Franklin, too, switched his base of operations to the Chesapeake to take advantage of the coastwise trade to New Orleans. As he established himself in Alexandria, Franklin formed a partnership with John Armfield, a successful slave trader in his own right.<sup>87</sup> The two men signed articles of agreement in February 1828 and three months later leased a house on Duke Street in Alexandria that became the headquarters for their firm. They signaled their intentions to be a large trading concern by advertising for one hundred and fifty “likely young negroes of both sexes between

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<sup>86</sup> Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, p. 39 (first quotation); Calderhead, “Professional Slave Trader,” p. 200 (estimate); Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass*, p. 76 (second quotation). For examples of Woolfolk’s slave shipments, see New Orleans Inward Slave Manifests, 25 Nov. 1822, 13 Dec. 1824, 21 Apr. 1825, 5 May 1828.

<sup>87</sup> Stephenson, *Isaac Franklin*, p. 23; Isabel Howell, “John Armfield, Slave-Trader,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 2 (1943): 3-29; Isabel Howell, “John Armfield of Beersheba Springs,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 3 (1944): 46-64, 156-67. Armfield, a former stagecoach driver, advertised that he wanted to buy thirty-five or forty “LIKELY NEGROES, either separately or in families, for which the highest price will be given” (*Alexandria Phenix Gazette*, 6 June 1826).

the ages of 8 and 25 years.” The firm consistently advertised for large numbers of slaves, saying it was “determined to give higher prices for slaves than any purchasers who are now, or may be hereafter in this market.”<sup>88</sup> It then expanded into the Baltimore area, and Armfield was giddy that they paid less there for slaves than they did in Alexandria. He told a colleague that “Woolfolk’s done us a good kindness when he caused us to go into that market.”<sup>89</sup>

Franklin and Armfield could offer top dollar for slaves because they eliminated the middlemen in their operations by purchasing their own ships. They bought the first of their four sailing vessels the same year they established their partnership. This ship, the *United States*, was a “fast sailing packet brig” that could hold up to one hundred and fifty slaves, although it normally carried about a hundred. The firm’s second ship, the *Tribune*, was of similar size and had two sections in its hold for housing slaves. The rear section held up to eighty bondservants and normally carried women, while one hundred men could cram into the forward compartment. Two raised platforms, each about five or six feet deep, jutted into the ship’s interior. On these ledges “the slaves lie, as close as they can stow away.”<sup>90</sup> By 1835 one of Franklin and Armfield’s ships

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<sup>88</sup> Alexandria *Phenix Gazette*, 17 May 1828 (quotation); *Succession of Isaac Franklin*, pp. 337-38; Washington *Daily National Intelligencer*, 1 June 1830.

<sup>89</sup> John Armfield to Rice C. Ballard, 26 Mar. 1832, Ballard Papers. Franklin and Armfield’s entry into the Baltimore market cut into Woolfolk’s business. By at least 1836, but probably earlier, Woolfolk was out of slave trading but still living in Baltimore where he owned several pieces of property (Christopher Phillips, *Freedom’s Port: The African American Community in Baltimore, 1790-1860* (Urbana, 1997), p. 230).

<sup>90</sup> The *United States* is described in New Orleans Inward Slave Manifests, 22 Oct. 1828; Alexandria *Phenix Gazette*, 22 Dec. 1829 (first quotation); and New Orleans

left Alexandria every other week during the shipping season. On return trips, the ships carried sugar, molasses, whiskey, and cotton. Franklin and Armfield's vessels brought more regularity to the trade since they sailed at consistent intervals and they increased profits by integrating the business operations of the firm. The ships reduced outside costs and were a source of revenue on the return voyage.<sup>91</sup>

The establishment of a permanent headquarters was another vital component to the growth of the interstate trade. In 1823 Woolfolk opened his office at his residence near the Three Ton Tavern on Pratt Street in Baltimore.<sup>92</sup> Establishing a fixed base of operations enabled him to create a sense of continuity in the increasingly competitive trade. Prior to this time, most slave traders operated out of taverns and stayed in town for several days or a week. Woolfolk, for instance, lodged in Mrs. Green's tavern in Easton before he established a permanent jail. Once traders established their jails, they tended, at first, to be on the edge of town or in undesirable areas. Woolfolk had to supply good directions to his residence that stood at the fork of the Washington and Frederick road in Baltimore.<sup>93</sup> Samuel Dawson established his jail "about eight miles from Fredericksburg." In Richmond, the best location that Lewis Collier could find was

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*Bee*, 20 Oct. 1831. A description of the *Tribune* is in William Jay, *Miscellaneous Writings on Slavery* (Boston, 1853), pp. 157-58 (second quotation).

<sup>91</sup> Stephenson, *Isaac Franklin*, pp. 40-44.

<sup>92</sup> Andrews, *Domestic Slave Trade*, p. 80; *Baltimore American*, 11 Aug., 12 Dec. 1823, 9 Apr. 1824. Woolfolk described his residence as being "above" the tavern, alternately spelled Ton, tunn, or Tuns, but it is clear from his extensive descriptions of the house that he meant down the road from the tavern, not literally above it. See also *Ibid.*, 4 Sept. 1823, 7 Jan. 1824.

<sup>93</sup> *Easton Republican Star*, 2 Jan. 1821, 10 Sept. 1822, 11 Aug. 1823.

“near the Poor-house.” Charles Mills was next to a livery stable while Goodwin and Templeman abutted a warehouse.<sup>94</sup> An anti-slavery organization noted that speculators kept slaves on the outskirts of towns in “dilapidated huts.” Even though the interstate slave trade was increasing in size and establishing a constant presence in the South, it physically remained separate from the best parts of town.<sup>95</sup>

The greatest change in slave trading during the 1820s was the formation of partnerships.<sup>96</sup> Although a joint venture forced them to share the profits, it held out the possibility of trading on such a scale where dividing the money would not be onerous. More importantly, having more than one person meant a division of labor. Traders became responsible for handling one aspect of the trade—the purchases in the Upper South, movement of the slaves, or the sales in the Lower South. George Kephart, for instance, mulled over whether to join forces with James Purvis or Thomas McCargo. Kephart wanted to stay in Virginia, admitting that it would be “unpleasant” to be in the “selling market.” He wanted to join with someone who “could be in the South all the season.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Fredericksburg *Virginia Herald*, 19 Apr. 1826; Richmond *Enquirer*, 19 Apr., 24 Nov. 1833; 16 Sept. 1834. Collier later bought Bacon Tait’s jail, near the Bell Tavern (*Ibid.*, 23 Aug. 1833).

<sup>95</sup> *Liberator*, 7 June 1834, p. 91.

<sup>96</sup> Before 1815, virtually all traders operated alone. For examples of some early traders, all of whom operated individually, see Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 12-21; Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, pp. 19-25.

<sup>97</sup> George Kephart to John Armfield, 16 Mar. 1838, Ballard Papers. Purvis traded in Baltimore (Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, pp. 39, 110), while McCargo bought slaves in Baltimore and Washington in order to sell in New Orleans (Tadman,

In a similar fashion, Woolfolk employed several men in his speculative enterprise once he switched his focus to the coastwise trade. He started with a number of his relatives. Richard Woolfolk originally sent slaves from Norfolk to New Orleans, but then moved to Maryland for the purpose of buying slaves.<sup>98</sup> Joseph Woolfolk also became an important buyer in Maryland, setting up his operations at Lowe's Tavern in Easton.<sup>99</sup> This location was ideal, since it was close to the site of the county slave auction, the local newspaper offices, the courthouse (where bills of sales were filed), and the local jail (where the sheriff boarded slaves for twenty-five cents a day). Joseph enticed planters to visit him by noting that he had just received "a fresh supply of that much wished for article, CASH."<sup>100</sup> Austin, Richard, and Joseph sent their slaves to New Orleans where John and Samuel Woolfolk arranged for their sale. Even Austin Woolfolk, Sr. visited New Orleans and occasionally helped sell slaves.<sup>101</sup> The use of

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*Speculators and Slaves*, p. 232). Five years earlier both Purvis and Kephart were agents of Franklin and Armfield (*Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 9 May 1833).

<sup>98</sup> New Orleans Inward Slave Manifests, 12 Mar., 5 May 1822, 18 June, 1 Sept. 1822 have evidence of Richard Woolfolk shipping from Norfolk, while *Ibid.*, 30 Dec. 1822, 27 Jan. 1823, and 9 Apr. 1823 have evidence of his shipments from Baltimore. Calderhead, "Professional Slave Trader," p. 198, characterizes Richard and three other Woolfolks as Austin's brothers, although there is no clear evidence to indicate whether this assertion is true or not.

<sup>99</sup> Easton *Republican Star*, 12 Apr. 1825, 9 Oct. 1827, 17 June 1828.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Aug. 1825 (quotation); Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass*, p. 78.

<sup>101</sup> New Orleans Inward Slave Manifests, 17 Dec. 1821; 26 Apr., 8 June, 30 Dec. 1822, 9 Apr., 17 May, 18 Nov. 1823. For different interpretations of his activities, see Calderhead, "Professional Slave Trader," pp. 195-211; Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass*, pp. 76-80; Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, pp. 39-44. That so many Woolfolks were involved in the trade may be another reason Douglass equated the name with speculation. Once they ran out of relatives, the Woolfolks involved others in their slave



relatives was quite common in the slave trade. John Springs III and his brother Eli bought slaves in Maryland and brought them to South Carolina.<sup>102</sup> Samuel and Joseph Meek were involved together, as were Isaac Franklin and his brother, James.<sup>103</sup> Speculators also formed alliances with non-relatives. Franklin, for instance, signed articles of agreement with John Armfield in early 1828. Tyre Glen signed an agreement with Isaac Jarratt in 1831 and then with William G. Norton five years later.<sup>104</sup> The tendency to form partnerships is indicative of how the interstate slave trade was becoming blatantly commercial and increasingly organized.

Not only did speculators form partnerships, but they also employed local agents who were responsible for a specific territory. Woolfolk appears to have been the first trader to employ such men, who bought slaves in one or two counties and then sent them to Baltimore for transshipment south. Henry N. Templeman worked the Eastern Shore for Woolfolk in the late 1820s. Like most of the other agents, Templeman lasted only a few years with Woolfolk before he moved on to establish his own trading

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trading operation. The firm of Woolfolk, Sanders, and Overly became a fixture on Maryland's Eastern Shore (*Princess Anne Village Herald*, 14 Sept. 1830, as quoted in Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, p. 32. Sanders and Overly went on to run their own slave trading firm once Woolfolk quit the business).

<sup>102</sup> Tadman, "Hidden History of Slave Trading," p. 21.

<sup>103</sup> Joseph Meek Papers, Virginia Historical Society; James R. Franklin is described as Isaac Franklin's brother in the Biographical Notes to the Rice C. Ballard Papers.

<sup>104</sup> Stephenson, *Isaac Franklin*, p. 23; Howell, "John Armfield," pp. 3-6; *Alexandria Phenix Gazette*, 6 June 1826; Agreement of Tyre Glen and Isaac Jarratt, 13 Nov. 1831, and "articles of agreement" between Glen and William G. Norton, 6 June 1836, Tyre Glen Papers. Armfield eventually married Franklin's niece.

operation.<sup>105</sup> The rapid turnover of the trade made it difficult to keep good people. Agents tried to establish themselves as speculators in their own right once they gained a few years' experience. A trader, most likely Woolfolk himself, advertised that he wanted three or four "respectable men" to "travel through different parts of the state of Maryland, to aid in the disposal of a very popular work – to whom a liberal compensation will be allowed." In order to prevent trouble, the advertisement warned, "no person need apply who will not enter into security for the amount placed in his hands."<sup>106</sup> Traders trusted agents with large sums of cash since they needed to be able to purchase slaves on the spot, meaning that employing agents could be risky.

Another indication of the trade's growth was the tendency amongst speculators to form loose alliances with one another. Typically a small trader made an affiliation with a large speculator. Ira Bowman, for instance, had a meager slave trading business out of a hotel in Alexandria, Virginia. In 1825 he started sending bondservants to Woolfolk in New Orleans on consignment. Both parties gained from the arrangement, as Bowman did not have to accompany his slaves to New Orleans and Woolfolk did not have take the risk of handing over large sums of cash to someone of dubious

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<sup>105</sup> Calderhead, "Professional Slave Trader," p. 197; *Easton Republican Star*, 9 Oct. 1827; *Princess Anne Village Herald*, 6 Dec. 1830, as quoted in Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, p. 32. For Templeman's later trading activity, see *Richmond Enquirer*, 19 Sept. 1834; H. N. Templeman Account Book, New York Public Library, New York, New York; Templeman and Goodwin Account Book, University of North Carolina; Omohundro and Templeman slave sale receipt, 18 Jan. 1844, Kennon Family Papers, University of Virginia.

<sup>106</sup> *Baltimore American*, 18 Dec. 1822.

reputation.<sup>107</sup> Franklin and Armfield had similar arrangements with traders. Armfield, who lured away some of Woolfolk's affiliates, established alliances with speculators in and around Richmond and Warrenton in Virginia, and Easton, Frederick, and Baltimore in Maryland.<sup>108</sup> With these men making most of the purchases, Armfield arranged for the slaves' transportation while Franklin sold them in Natchez and New Orleans.<sup>109</sup> Franklin and Armfield sold the slaves of their affiliates for half the profit, a beneficial arrangement for both parties since it cut down on overhead.<sup>110</sup> At the beginning of each trading season, Franklin arranged for a coffle to be sent from Tennessee to Natchez before he left his home in Franklin, Tennessee. His brother, James, accompanied the

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<sup>107</sup> New Orleans Inward Slave Manifests, 3 Nov. 1825, 6 Feb. 1826, 2 Mar. 1827. Bowman's advertisements are in *Alexandria Phenix Gazette*, 25 May 1825; and Michael Ridgeway, "A Peculiar Business: Slave Trading in Alexandria, Virginia, 1825-1861," Unpublished Master's Thesis, Georgetown University, 1976, pp. 19-21.

<sup>108</sup> John Armfield to Rice C. Ballard, 26 Mar. 1832, Ballard Papers. The affiliates were Rice C. Ballard (Richmond), John M. Saunders (Warrenton), George Kephart (Frederick), Thomas M. Jones (Easton), and James F. Purvis (Baltimore) (Washington *Daily National Intelligencer*, 9 May 1833).

<sup>109</sup> The assumption of Franklin and Armfield's division of labor is drawn from the fact that visitors to the firm's slave pen in Alexandria saw Armfield and not Franklin, the establishment of Franklin's citizenship in Louisiana, the slave manifests of the firm which list Armfield as the shipper and Franklin as the receiver, and the men's letters in the Rice C. Ballard Papers, all of which gives Franklin's address as New Orleans or Natchez and Armfield's address as Alexandria. See, respectively, Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, pp. 135-39; Edward S. Abdy, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America*, 2 vol. (London, 1835) 2: 179-80; *Succession of Isaac Franklin*, pp. 338-42; New Orleans Inward Slave Manifests, 22 Oct. 1828; and Ballard Papers.

<sup>110</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 1 Nov. 1833, *Ibid.* In this letter, Franklin forwarded \$20,000 to Ballard—receipts from sales of Ballard's slaves.

coffle while Isaac traveled in comfort.<sup>111</sup> At the end of each trading season, Armfield accompanied one overland coffle to Natchez or New Orleans and spent the spring in the South. He, too, traveled in style—in a barouche rather than riding horseback with the coffle.<sup>112</sup>

Franklin's arrangement with Rice C. Ballard seems to have been typical of the alliances between traders. The Customs invoice that accompanied each shipment contained enough information to identify the slaves and usually gave their purchase price. Speculators sent specific instructions on another invoice, as well. When Franklin received a shipment of sixty-three slaves from Ballard, he assured the man that "together with your request what disposition I should make of some of the negroes all of which I will attend to when an opportunity offers." Franklin cautioned Ballard that the "invoys price is so high that you may look out for short profits."<sup>113</sup> In 1836 Tait, Boudar, and Company of Richmond sent twenty-three slaves to Ballard, Franklin, and Company in Natchez. The invoice listed the name, age, height, color, and cost of each of the slaves. There was also a space for remarks. On the reverse of the invoice was a letter describing the specific qualities of many of the slaves. One man was an "excellent marksman – a pretty good cook and also a very smart dining room servant." There was also "an excellent cook washer & Ironer & a very steady woman" in the

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<sup>111</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 5 Oct. 1832 and James R. Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 23 Nov. 1832, *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, pp. 142, 148.

<sup>113</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 5 Nov. 1833, Ballard Papers.

group.<sup>114</sup> Specific skills such as these enhanced a slave's value, so traders wanted to ensure that purchasers knew the abilities of any slaves they purchased.

It is clear that Franklin and Armfield considered themselves separate from their affiliates. In Richmond, for instance, Franklin and Armfield kept in constant contact with Rice C. Ballard. Franklin or his brother gave Ballard frequent information as to the state of the slave market in general and the status of Ballard's slaves in particular.<sup>115</sup> Ballard, in turn, concentrated on buying slaves in and around Richmond but did not have to take the time to accompany them to New Orleans or Natchez. Franklin and Armfield made some extra cash for handling a few more slaves. Since they were already established in the Lower South, the cost of taking on new slaves was minimal. There was a limit, however, to how many men could be affiliated with Franklin and Armfield. At one point, Franklin turned down the opportunity to expand his business dealings, explaining that he had as many "concerns & partners as our two men can possibly do justice."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Slave invoice from Tait, Boudar and Company to Ballard, Franklin, and Company, dated 23 Sept. 1836. Tait purchased the fifteen men and twelve women for \$22,246.70 and shipped them 26 Sept. 1836 on the Brig *Tribune*. He kept a jail in Richmond and became quite rich from the trade (Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, p. 101). Thomas Boudar concentrated on selling slaves in New Orleans by the 1850s (Ibid., pp. 92, 277, 314).

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, the letter of Isaac Franklin describing the how Ballard's "little slim assed Girls and boys are intirely out of the way [i.e., sold]" (Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 8 Dec. 1832, Ballard Papers).

<sup>116</sup> Isaac and James Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 9 Oct. 1833, Ibid. Isaac Franklin thought it better to do well with what they had rather than do too much and do it badly.

Speculators had to trust one another if such an arrangement was to work properly. Unscrupulous traders in New Orleans could rob their colleagues by claiming a lower selling price for slaves and pocketing the difference. At one point, Ballard grew uneasy about his alliance with Franklin and complained about the terms. Franklin responded with a long letter extolling the virtues of Franklin and Armfield in an effort to convince Ballard to continue the arrangement.<sup>117</sup> He knew that Ballard had few options, since speculators avoided the notoriously corrupt traders. Lewis Collier of Richmond busied himself “making Dismal efforts to form several concerns with other Traders.” He failed, according to Franklin, because “he looks as much like a thief as any man I have ever seen in my life.”<sup>118</sup> Woolfolk eventually lost much his market because of his shady business practices. Armfield described Woolfolk’s “standing” as “verry bad” because he cheated people.<sup>119</sup>

Even as speculators moved in and out of the interstate slave trade, they changed the nature of the business during the fifteen years after the War of 1812. Speculation was no longer a haphazard enterprise, with individual traders staying in taverns, buying up slaves where they could find them, and transporting them to the Deep South whenever they could manage to get enough to constitute a coffle. Innovations such as slave jails, agents, and coastwise sailing patterns brought a measure of certainty and

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<sup>117</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 15 Aug. 1832, Ibid. Ballard continued his association with Franklin and Armfield, became a full partner in the firm and then retired by 1838.

<sup>118</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 9 Oct. 1834, Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> John Armfield to Rice C. Ballard, 26 Mar. 1832, Ibid.

regularity to the trade. Speculators established headquarters which doubled as jails, so they would no longer have to keep their slaves in local jails, or worse yet, taverns. A central location also made it easy for prospective sellers to locate them. Agents became responsible for clearly defined areas and enabled the firms to have better control over the market. Use of the coastwise trade meant that traders did not have to waste valuable time transporting slaves to the Southwest. Buyers in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi who desired labor now had a good indication of when new slaves would arrive and could be assured that they had enough slaves from which to choose.<sup>120</sup> This increased systematization was combined with the relatively informal nature of the rural trade. Itinerant traders still roved the countryside or bought slaves at auction. They sold slaves in haphazard fashion, and only used the urban market if they did not unload all of their bondservants once they reached the Deep South. There was a mix of urban and rural traders in the South, as more traders operated on an informal basis in the backcountry but more slaves were sold in the urban markets. In the decade of the 1820s the interstate slave trade grew from paltry beginnings to a vital component of the southern economy. It became, in essence, the means of adjusting the cloak of slavery to the growing South. There was, however, increasing dissatisfaction with the means by which the interstate slave trade accomplished its purposes.

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<sup>120</sup> The interstate slave trade fits the general pattern of economic development posited in Charles Grier Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York, 1991). The slave trade's growth, however, seems more dependent on internal development through territorial expansion rather than integration into the Atlantic market economy. See also Harry L. Watson, "Slavery and Development in a Dual Economy: The South and the Market Revolution," in Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, Religious Expressions, 1800-1880* (Charlottesville, 1996), pp. 50-51.

## Chapter Two

Leonard Covington had to move from his Maryland home to a farm just outside of Washington, Mississippi, in 1809. Covington, who had made a name as an Indian fighter and a member of Congress, received an appointment as commander of a company of light dragoons in the Mississippi Territory. He first had to find land for a farm and then decide how to move his slaves. His brother, Alexander, went ahead to the new territory to secure a location and await the arrival of part of the family's slaves. Leonard wanted to ensure the safe transfer of any bondservants he might dispatch to his brother and also wanted to make the transition to the new territory go as smoothly as possible. To those ends, he divided his slave force in two, so that a portion could prepare the land while the others tended crops in Maryland. Covington sent thirty-one slaves to Mississippi "under charge of careful friends" and kept twenty-five on the Aquasco Plantation in Maryland. Of the thirty-six slaves under the age of twenty, two-thirds went to Mississippi. By contrast, seven of the nine slaves over thirty years old remained in Maryland.<sup>1</sup>

Covington deliberately stocked the new plantation with young slaves who could better endure the hardships associated with establishing a farm. He was not alone. Migrants understood the difficulties involved in the process. William Beverley, who moved to Alabama, was "greatly disappointed" with his new land and found life almost

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<sup>1</sup> Nellie Wales Brandon and W. M. Drake, eds., *Memoir of Leonard Covington by B. L. C. Wailes* (n.p., 1861; reprint, 1928), pp. 53-59. More information on Covington can be found in Trese, ed., *Biographical Directory*, p. 869.



more than he could bear. His meat rotted too quickly, the milk soured in six to eight hours, and barrels of flour spoiled before he could use them. He felt that the “pioneer of the forest” must “endure tremendous hardships & privation of all kinds & live in filth & rags.”<sup>2</sup> While life was hard on the master, it was worse, of course, for the slave.

Bondservants such as those who belonged to Covington and Beverley had an arduous life once they reached their destination. Not only did they suffer the pain of being torn from their family and familiar surroundings, but the work of establishing a farm was especially toilsome. Clearing the land took several years since trees were normally girdled, or had a circle of bark cut out that caused the tree to wither and die. Slaves then dug out the stumps or plowed around the roots, in addition to their other duties of burning underbrush, herding livestock, and constructing cabins, outbuildings, and fences. On top of these activities, the slaves planted cotton as soon as possible. Being a cash crop, it enabled the owner to recoup his investment of time, money, and energy.<sup>3</sup>

The strenuous work of establishing a farm took its toll. Covington, like most other owners, knew that he must reserve his most active slaves for the new enterprise. He was reluctant to bring older slaves who would be relatively unproductive but would still consume food, often scarce and costly in emerging areas of settlement. Young slaves in particular had the advantage of more years of service ahead of them than older

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<sup>2</sup> William Beverley to Robert Beverley, 1 Apr. 1831, Beverley Family Papers.

<sup>3</sup> For information on settlement, see Stephen F. Miller, “Plantation Labor and Slave Life on the Cotton Frontier: The Alabama-Mississippi Black Belt, 1815-1840,” in Berlin and Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture*, pp. 158-59; and Daniel S. Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama 1800-1840* (Baton Rouge, 1997), pp. 9-48.

bondservants and were more likely to procreate and thus increase the master's equity. Owners also tried to balance their workforce between laborers and mechanics. Covington hoped his brother could make due with the slaves on hand because he had difficulty shaping the labor force to his liking. He told his brother that he had tried to purchase mechanics as recommended, but slaves in Maryland "are comparatively scarce and exceedingly dear." Such mechanics were indispensable for the maintenance of plantations, especially for keeping equipment in good working order, and the lack of such talent could impair production. Even though aspiring planters had an idea of what types of slaves they wanted, they often settled for bondservants of almost any description.<sup>4</sup>

Covington's experience offers insights into the movement of slaves in early nineteenth century America. He deliberately chose to send most of his younger slaves to Mississippi while keeping the older ones in Maryland. Taking his brother's advice, he tried to purchase slaves whose skills would be productive on the frontier, but balked when asked to pay what he thought were exorbitant prices. The cost and availability of slaves in Maryland hindered Covington's ability to send his brother the exact types of bondservants necessary for success in the new land. Alexander Covington would have to make do with unskilled labor. While Covington's decisions were economic, there was a limit to what he could accomplish. He also had to consider his slaves' attitudes. One of the men, Sam, refused to travel to Mississippi and maintained a "sullen silence on the subject." Covington instructed slaves in Mississippi to write to Sam using "a few fine flourishes touching the good things and matters in Natchez" in order to convince

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<sup>4</sup> Brandon and Drake, eds., *Memoir of Leonard Covington*, p. 54.

the reluctant slave to move to Mississippi. When the epistolary campaign failed and Sam remained uncertain of Mississippi's allure, Covington sold the man in Maryland, bought another slave, and sent that one to his brother. Even though several of Sam's friends and, quite likely, his family had already gone west, his desire to remain behind was strong enough that he defied his owner and risked severe punishment. He might have had a wife or family off of the plantation and wanted to stay close to them. Perhaps he heard stories about Mississippi's harsh climate. Whatever the case, Sam won this battle of wills. Covington could have forced Sam to go to Mississippi, but demurred, most likely because he did not want to take the risk of having Sam run away during the overland journey, or saddle his brother with the headache of dealing with a refractory slave. From Covington's perspective, Sam's insubordination could be contagious and lead to even greater troubles if other slaves decided not to do as they were told. The master's decision to sell the slave was a bit of compromise, one intended to prevent any further disturbances.<sup>5</sup>

Although Sam fought successfully to stay in Maryland, countless other slaves made the trek south or west. The early republic witnessed a great slave migration, with almost 350,000 bondservants leaving Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina between 1810 and 1840.<sup>6</sup> Bondservants marched in slave traders'

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-54, 57, 59.

<sup>6</sup> Peter D. McClelland and Richard J. Zeckhauser, *Demographic Dimensions of the New Republic: American Interregional Migration, Vital Statistics, and Manumissions, 1800-1860* (New York, 1982), pp. 159-64. From 1790 to 1860 it is estimated that one million slaves crossed state lines due to some type of forced migration (Herbert Gutman and Richard Sutch, "The Slave Family: Protected Agent of Capitalist Masters or Victim of the Slave Trade?" in Paul A. David, et al., *Reckoning*

coffles, migrated with planters, and became the objects of purchase by Deep South planters. The three components blended together, sometimes forming a seamless whole and often being indistinguishable on a practical level. Slaves were exploited in all cases and the effects on them were virtually identical. Sam, and countless other slaves like him, suffered innumerable trials from the forced migration of loved ones. Forcible separations destroyed about one-third of all first slave marriages in the Upper South, and placed all slaves, but particularly those less than thirty years old, in danger of being separated from their families.<sup>7</sup>

While slaves might not make a distinction between speculation, movement with planters, and planter purchases, southern whites did. The slaves in Covington's possession before he and his brother established the Mississippi plantation, for instance, could rightfully be considered a part of planter migration since they were not purchased expressly for a move to the frontier. Those slaves whom Covington purchased specifically for the purpose of populating the Mississippi plantation are another case. They had much in common with bondservants found in traders' coffles, namely, being purchased with the intention of being removed to another state. Covington, in effect, was speculating that these slaves would be productive once they moved to the Southwest. He, of course, would not agree with this assessment. The purchase of slaves, in his eyes, was the prerogative of the master and was not for speculation but as an investment. Southerners, in general, differentiated between buying slaves for

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*with Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1976), p. 99.

<sup>7</sup> Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 133-78.

settlement and buying slaves for speculation.<sup>8</sup> Even though migration and speculation were similar in outward appearance, southerners thought it vital to separate them as much as possible. The former was acceptable while the latter was looked upon with disdain. Creating an artificial distinction between the interstate slave trade and planters buying or selling slaves was one way of marking the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. With the line firmly established, southerners believed that most slave movement was due to planter migration even as the trade increased in volume.

Disentangling the interstate slave trade from other types of slave movement is a thorny problem. Contemporaries noticed the trade's expansion and made conjectures about its extent. One of the earliest estimates, noted that the trade had "greatly increased" during the last year and alleged that speculators brought 20,000 slaves into Georgia between 1815 and 1818. That is an astounding number and a preposterous estimate. In 1810 the African-American population of Georgia was 107,019 and with the natural increase would have been 132,483 in 1820 had no slaves entered or departed the state. The actual population was 151,419 in 1820, giving the state an increase of almost 19,000 slaves over the natural growth rate for the decade.<sup>9</sup> Bondservants

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<sup>8</sup> Allan Kulikoff rightly believes that it "might be misleading" for historians to draw a sharp distinction between planter migration and trader speculation. He sees the two as being indistinguishable on a practical level. It is difficult to cleanly separate them for the purposes of allocating the percentages of slaves who were moved through the trade and those who were subject to migration. My point is that the behaviors were essentially similar, but that white southerners tried to distinguish between them for purposes of denying their own culpability in separating slave families and ruining slaves' lives (Kulikoff, *Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism*, p. 251, note 52).

<sup>9</sup> *Niles' Weekly Register*, 19 July 1817 (quotation). See also undated *New York Commercial Advertiser*, as quoted in Warrenton (Virginia) *Palladium of Liberty*, 23 Aug. 1817. The population statistics are from U. S. Bureau of Census, Census of 1810

certainly left the state with their masters, although the figure was relatively low because fresh land was still opening up in Georgia and the incentives for whites to leave the state were minimal. The importation of African slaves, moreover, was still substantial and was probably greater than the movement of bondservants to other states. If somehow the flow of slaves out of the state offset the natural increase and the importation of Africans, then just over 44,000 slaves entered Georgia during the decade. Even if all of them came as part of the interstate trade, it is doubtful that almost half of them arrived in three years. The estimate of 20,000 slaves is, therefore, impossible. What is significant is that contemporaries regarded the figure as credible. The sudden increase in the slave market at Hamburg made it appear as though bondservants were inundating the state. As more slave traders clogged roads with their coffles, incredible estimates seemed plausible. The complete figures are reproduced in Table Five.

**Table Five**  
**Georgia Slave Population, 1810 and 1820**

1810 Georgia census, slaves	107,019
1820 Expected population by natural increase	132,483
1820 Georgia census, slaves	151,419
Number of slaves beyond natural increase	18,936

Sources: U. S. Bureau of Census, Census of 1810 (Washington, D. C., 1811), Census of 1820 (Washington, D. C., 1821); Peter D. McClelland and Richard J. Zeckhauser, *Demographic Dimensions of the New Republic: American Interregional Migration, Vital Statistics, and Manumissions, 1800-1860* (New York, 1982), p. 81.

As the slave trade became more active by 1830, estimates became common, even though they varied widely. In 1827 the *African Observer* noted that “[d]ealing in

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(Washington, D. C., 1811), and Census of 1820 (Washington, D. C., 1821). The 2.4% annual rate of natural increase is found in McClelland and Zeckhauser, *Demographic Dimensions of the New Republic*, p. 81.

slaves has become a large business” and put the number of bondservants exported out of the District of Columbia and the adjacent areas of Maryland and Virginia at 2,000 per year.<sup>10</sup> Five years later a popular estimate from Virginia held that traders sold 6,000 of the state’s slaves in the Deep South each year.<sup>11</sup> A guess from 1836 put the number of slaves who left Virginia, whether through sale or migration with owners, at somewhere between 60,000 and 80,000 annually. That same year, the *Virginia Times* of Wheeling noted that “intelligent men” put slave exports at 120,000.<sup>12</sup> A Virginia resident ably summed up the general trend when he wrote that the slave trade was carried on “to a far greater extent than ever.”<sup>13</sup>

Even if the estimates themselves varied widely, they displayed the pattern of a growing slave trade. In 1830, Virginia’s African-American population numbered 461,634. Incredibly, the state had fewer African-Americans ten years later. Assuming a natural growth rate of 2.0%, there should have been 551,697 African-Americans in 1840. Instead there were 440,140, meaning the state lost over 111,500 African-

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<sup>10</sup> *African Observer*, June 1827.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas R. Dew, *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832*, as reprinted in *The Pro-Slavery Argument as Maintained by the Most Distinguished Writers of the Southern States* (Philadelphia, 1853), p. 359; Drew Gilpin Faust, ed. *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1981), p. 31; [Jesse Burton Harrison], *Review of the Slave Question, extracted from the American Quarterly Review, Dec. 1832* (Richmond, 1833), pp. 17, 32.

<sup>12</sup> *Wheeling Virginia Times*, as quoted in *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 8 Oct. 1836, p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> *Liberator*, 13 Feb. 1836, p. 26 (quotation); Theodore D. Weld, *American Slavery As It Is: The Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York), p. 184.

Americans during the decade. The vast majority of these people were slaves rather than free blacks, meaning that an average of around 11,500 bondservants left Virginia each year. If the estimate of 6,000 from 1831 is correct, then the slaves who were forced out of Virginia between 1830 and 1840 were split almost equally between slave traders and migrants. The other conjectures were preposterous. Once again, that ridiculously high estimates could be widely circulated reflects the spectacular growth of the interstate slave trade. Table Six has the complete figures for Virginia's African-American population.<sup>14</sup>

**Table Six**  
**Virginia Slave Population, 1820 and 1830**

1830 Virginia census, African-Americans	461,634
1840 Expected population by natural increase	551,697
1840 Virginia census, African-Americans	440,140
Number of African-Americans less than natural increase	111,557

Sources: U. S. Bureau of Census, Census of 1830 (Washington, D. C., 1831), Census of 1840 (Washington, D. C., 1841); Peter D. McClelland and Richard J. Zeckhauser, *Demographic Dimensions of the New Republic: American Interregional Migration, Vital Statistics, and Manumissions, 1800-1860* (New York, 1982), p. 81.

The growth of the interstate slave trade in the lower Mississippi valley did not escape the attention of contemporaries, either. As more and more coffles and ships arrived in the slave markets of Natchez and New Orleans, residents of Mississippi and Louisiana noticed the volume of bondservants entering their states. In 1824 New Orleans was thought to import between 4,000 and 5,000 slaves from Maryland and

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<sup>14</sup> U. S. Bureau of Census, Census of 1830, (Washington, D. C., 1831); Census of 1840, (Washington, D. C., 1841). The annual rate of natural increase is found in McClelland and Zeckhauser, *Demographic Dimensions*, p. 81.



Virginia. Seven years later a New Orleans paper reported that 1,011 slaves entered the city in one month, but another count for the same time period put the figure at 1,327.<sup>15</sup> A visitor to Natchez learned that 4,000 slaves entered Mississippi in 1834 and that a third made their way to the city's slave market.<sup>16</sup> Just before the speculative bubble burst in 1837, the *Natchez Courier* thought that 250,000 slaves entered Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Arkansas in the past year.<sup>17</sup>

Like the figures for slaves brought out of Virginia, the estimates for African-Americans entering Mississippi and Louisiana were off the mark. Taken together, the states had 101,878 African-Americans in 1820 and 175,247 ten years later. Assuming a natural increase of 2.5%, the two states could have expected a population of 130,414 in 1830. Therefore, about 45,000 slaves entered Mississippi and Louisiana during the decade, since by this time there was virtually no African slave trade and few slaves left the state since the opportunities for settling land were still vast.<sup>18</sup> In calculating the next

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<sup>15</sup> New Orleans *Bee*, 18 Nov. 1831 (first estimate); New Orleans *Advertiser*, 17 Nov. 1831, as reprinted in Richmond *Enquirer*, 2 Dec. 1831 (second estimate); Hodgson, *Letters from North America*, 2: 194; *Liberator*, 7 June 1834, p. 91.

<sup>16</sup> Ingraham, *South-West by a Yankee*, 2: 244. Speculation even reached a fever pitch in Cahawba, Alabama. One Tennessee resident marveled at the "extravagant prices" that slaves fetched there. He learned that at least one thousand were sold in that city in the first five months of 1836, including one hundred and sixty in one day. In amazement, he wondered, "What *price* does negroes bear in Tennessee!" (W. W. Fambro to Col. R. Weakley, 13 May 1836, Edward Litton Hickman Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee, emphasis in original).

<sup>17</sup> Undated *Natchez Courier*, as quoted in Weld, *American Slavery As It Is*, p. 184.

<sup>18</sup> Census of 1820; Census of 1830. The annual rate of natural increase is found in McClelland and Zeckhauser, *Demographic Dimensions*, p. 81.

decade's imports, however, the two states gained an astounding 153,000 slaves above the expected natural increase, or over 15,000 per year. This net gain was mainly due to Mississippi nearly tripling its slave population between 1830 and 1840. The decade of the 1830s, especially before the panic of 1837, was a time of unparalleled movement of slaves from the Upper South to the Lower South. Table Seven has the complete figures.<sup>19</sup>

**Table Seven**  
**Louisiana and Mississippi Slave Population, 1820, 1830 and 1840**

1820 Louisiana and Mississippi census, slaves	101,878
1830 Expected population by natural increase	130,414
1830 Louisiana and Mississippi census, slaves	175,247
Number of slaves above the natural increase	44,833
1840 Expected population by natural increase	210,247
1840 Louisiana and Mississippi census, slaves	363,663
Number of slaves above the natural increase	153,416

Sources: Census of 1820 (Washington, D. C., 1821), Census of 1830 (Washington, D. C., 1831), Census of 1840 (Washington, D. C., 1841); Peter D. McClelland and Richard J. Zeckhauser, *Demographic Dimensions of the New Republic: American Interregional Migration, Vital Statistics, and Manumissions, 1800-1860* (New York, 1982), p. 81.

While it is apparent that the volume of slave migration increased dramatically in the nineteenth century, the allocation of responsibility remains unclear. The numbers are silent when trying to separate the interstate trade, movement with masters, and planter purchases. A further complication is the fact that no single source gives a clear view of slave movement. Ship manifests offer a glimpse into the movement of slaves along the nation's coasts, but they do not clearly distinguish between traders and

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<sup>19</sup> Census of 1840. The annual rate of natural increase is found in McClelland and Zeckhauser, *Demographic Dimensions*, p. 81.

planters. More importantly, they are incomplete. For instance, John Armfield told one observer that his firm shipped 1,000 slaves out of Alexandria in 1833 and expected to ship 1,200 the next year. Surviving manifests indicate Franklin and Armfield shipped one hundred and sixty three in 1833 and two hundred and fifty eight a year later. Not only are many of the manifests themselves missing, but the coastwise trade made up only a portion of the overall slave trade.<sup>20</sup> Various counties and parishes have records of slave sales that have been analyzed by historians, but, again, they suffer from many of the same deficiencies. When looking at most surviving documents, there is no certain way to distinguish between traders and planters. More importantly, they, too, are incomplete since not all transactions involving the sale of slaves were registered and many of the records themselves are missing or have been destroyed.

Despite such difficulties, historians have tried to estimate the volume of the interstate slave trade. Allan Kulikoff provided the most thorough analysis for the years before 1820. He argued that there was no organized trade out of Virginia until about 1810, and for the next decade about one-third of the slaves who went south from the Chesapeake did so with a slave trader. Professional speculators became active in large numbers after 1820 as the number of slaves transported out of the state increased.<sup>21</sup> On this point there is general agreement, although Michael Tadman held open the

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<sup>20</sup> Donald M. Sweig, "Northern Virginia Slavery: A Statistical and Demographic Investigation," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, William and Mary College, 1982, p. 226. Wesley, "Manifests of Slave Shipments," pp. 155-74 has the most complete discussion of the matter. There has not been an attempt to estimate the proportion of slaves transported in the coastwise trade.

<sup>21</sup> Kulikoff, *Agrarian Origins*, pp. 239-42; Kulikoff, "Uprooted Peoples," pp. 151-52.

possibility of up to one-half of slave migrants being subject to the slave trade before 1820.<sup>22</sup> If there is some difference of opinion regarding the size of the pre-1820 trade, there is universal acceptance that it increased dramatically in the 1820s and 1830s until the bubble of speculation burst during the panic of 1837.<sup>23</sup> A difference of opinion arises, however, in trying to calculate the volume of the trade after 1820. Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman examined the interstate slave trade as part of their “cliometric” analysis and estimated that sixteen percent of slave migrants who moved south did so at the behest of slave traders. Herbert Gutman and Richard Sutch effectively disputed this low estimate by questioning the sources upon which Fogel and Engerman based their study.<sup>24</sup>

The most sophisticated examination of the slave trade’s volume came from Michael Tadman, who gave a much higher figure for the percentage of slaves involved in the slave trade. In his analysis of the importance of speculation in the years after

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<sup>22</sup> Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, p. 44.

<sup>23</sup> Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York), pp. 188-90; Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South*, pp. 382-403; Deyle, “Domestic Slave Trade,” p. 78.

<sup>24</sup> Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston, 1974), pp. 44-58. Their estimate is based on the work of William Calderhead, who studied eight Maryland counties and concluded that three and a half percent of the state’s slaves moved south with slave traders (William Calderhead, “How Extensive was the Border State Slave Trade? A New Look,” *Civil War History*, 18 (1972): 42-55). For an effective rebuttal of Fogel and Engerman, see Herbert Gutman and Richard Sutch, “The Slave Family: Protected Agent of Capitalist Masters or Victim of the Slave Trade?” in Paul A. David, et al., *Reckoning with Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1976), 94-113.

1820, Tadman employed a sophisticated survivor-rate technique involving figures from the United States Census records. Taking the number of slaves in each age range of the census, he calculated how many should have survived the decade. Using these “survival rates,” he estimated how many slaves should have been present at the end of the decade in the Upper South and the Lower South and how many actually were enumerated in the census. He found that the Upper South had shed a substantial amount of prime, young-adult slaves. Tadman also examined the coastal manifests of New Orleans and showed that Fogel and Engerman made faulty assumptions by not adequately taking into account sugar production’s heavy for young male slaves. Finally, he compiled evidence of trading activity in South Carolina in the 1850s. According to Tadman’s calculations, almost seven out of ten slave migrants moved with slave traders in the 1820s. His figure for the 1850s was slightly lower, being just over six out of ten. The census records are not in the proper format for calculating the other decades, but Tadman estimated there was a similar rate of trading. Thus he believed, for a whole, at least sixty to seventy percent of slave migrants from 1820 to 1860 moved south and west at the behest of a speculator.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 11-46, 225-27, 237-82. His actual figures are sixty-nine percent for the 1820s and sixty-one percent for the 1850s. Deyle, “Domestic Slave Trade,” pp. 252-66 discusses the historiographical debate of estimates involving the slave trade. James David Miller explores the attitudes and activities of emigrants from Georgia and South Carolina to the developing area of the Southwest but does not specifically deal with the issue of planters bringing their slaves with them or using the services of a speculator once they reach their destination (James David Miller, “South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Elite Ideology in the Deep South, 1815-1861,” Emory University, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, 1996).

Tadman made several assumptions in his work. He believed that no significant numbers of African slaves entered the United States between 1820 and 1860. The slave population, in other words, was closed. Tadman also posited that planters who moved westward brought all of their slaves with them rather than engaging in selective migration. Finally, he discounted the presence of any significant number of Deep South planters who purchased their own slaves in the Upper South. That the United States was essentially a closed population after 1820 is probably correct, since by that time there was effective enforcement of the African slave trade laws. It is uncertain, however, whether owners brought all of their slaves with them rather than buying or selling bondservants prior to migration or how many Deep South planters made purchases in the Upper South. These two assumptions are the key to Tadman's argument since they are the only way to separate planters from slave traders. According to him, migrants and planters engaged in behavior that was different from each other, and these activities become apparent when examining the census records. However, if migration cannot be neatly separated from speculation then his estimates lose their authority. The census records will not be enough to estimate speculation's volume if owners and traders engaged in similar activity.

Put another way, Tadman assumed that owners engaged in speculative behavior only when dealing with slave traders. Such was not the case. Even though they would not have viewed it as such, many white southerners speculated in slaves even when not selling to or buying from a trader. They commonly altered the composition of the labor force prior to migration or traveled a thousand miles to buy slaves in the Upper South. Most southerners did not regard such activities with the disdain reserved for the slave

trade. It was the short-term speculation, buying bondservants with the intention of quickly reselling them, that was troublesome because it ran counter to whites' assumption that slavery was benign. Selling slaves for the sole purpose of making money was hard to defend. Masters, however, could seize upon such behavior in order to justify their own actions. The slave trade, even though it paralleled the activities of slaveholders in many ways, came to be seen as distinct from migration with masters or planter purchases.

The contours of movement to the frontier obviously varied. Some whites brought all of their slaves with them during their westward migration. When Thomas H. Dent moved from South Carolina to Alabama in 1836, for example, he "took along all the slaves that went with the rice plantation."<sup>26</sup> A move like Dent's was an arduous ordeal for most bondservants, but masters accommodated the needs of those who could not keep up with the rest of the group. A traveler met "a great many families of planters emigrating to Alabama and Mississippi to take up cotton planting." The male slaves walked, while some of the females and children rode in wagons. He estimated he saw a thousand slaves "all trudging on foot, and worn down with fatigue."<sup>27</sup>

Even though it was possible to take all slaves westward, many white migrants of the nineteenth century South were selective when it came time to move. Indeed, some

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas H. Dent, as quoted in James Benson Sellers, *Slavery in Alabama* (University, Ala., 1950), p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States*, p. 152 (quotation); Basil Hall, *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828*, 2 vol. (Philadelphia, 1829), 2: 128-29; Hodgson, *Letters from North America*, 1: 113-14, 138. Tadman's discussion of the structure of planter migrations is found in *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 228-36.

of Tadman's evidence suggests that planters did not bring a representative cross-section of bondservants. He examined the coastal manifests into New Orleans in the years 1841, 1843, 1845, 1847, and 1849, separating the known slave traders from the rest of the sample. In both categories, he broke down the population into the age ranges found in the United States census and then compared the age structure of the three categories to the slave population in the net-exporting states. It is obvious that slave traders selectively purchased slaves, as there is a disproportionate amount of male and female bondservants between the ages of ten and twenty-nine. Such is to be expected since traders concentrated in supplying the most productive and desirable slaves. What is surprising, though, is the profile of the remaining slaves in the manifests. There is a decided lack of male slaves under ten years of age, and a noticeable concentration of male slaves aged twenty to twenty-nine. The other age ranges vary slightly from those of the Upper South. This sample is not a pure one, as it is likely a few of the smaller traders were not separated from the planters, but they probably did not bias the data in any way. The age structure reflects the nature of the Louisiana sugar production with its emphasis on adult males who could handle the bulk of the labor in the cane fields and cannot be considered representative for the rest of the South. The pattern that emerges, at least for Louisiana in the 1840s, is one that shows planters using selective migration or making slave buying trips of their own in order to meet their labor needs. Owners who bought slaves or brought them to Louisiana did not incorporate the extreme methods of the trade, but neither did they bring a cross-section of the slave population. Rather than choosing bondservants on the humanitarian basis of keeping all of their slaves together, planters also incorporated economic considerations into their



decision making. They, too, were concerned about profit and loss and brought the most productive slaves to their plantations rather than burden themselves with those slaves they perceived as being a drag on profits. Table Eight summarizes Tadman's findings.<sup>28</sup>

**Table Eight**  
**Slaves Imported into Louisiana by Slave Traders and Planters**  
**1841, 1843, 1845, 1847, and 1849**

Age Range	0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40+
Upper South, Males	16.0	12.7	8.7	5.2	7.4
Upper South, Females	16.2	12.6	8.5	5.3	7.5
Upper South, Total	32.2	25.3	16.3	10.5	14.9
New Orleans Customs Manifests with known traders, Males	3.5	17.8	32.4	4.2	1.4
New Orleans Customs Manifests with known traders, Females	4.7	23.5	9.3	2.1	1.1
New Orleans Customs Manifests with known traders, Total	8.3	41.3	41.7	6.3	2.5
New Orleans Customs Manifests without known traders, Males	10.5	12.8	17.0	7.3	5.6
New Orleans Customs Manifests without known traders, Females	10.6	14.6	11.0	6.1	4.5
New Orleans Customs Manifests without known traders, Total	21.1	27.4	28.0	13.4	10.1

Source: Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, 1989), p. 234.

What is true for Louisiana in the 1840s holds for the rest of the South, particularly in the early decades of the century. Most white migrants "took only selected members of their slave forces, selling the others with the plantation to family

<sup>28</sup> Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 231-35, table on p. 234.

members.”<sup>29</sup> One traveler encountered a caravan of white migrants headed for Georgia. Each family had a wagon and a selection of “field slaves.” He learned that planters generally disposed of the slaves who had a personal attachment to their home and did not want to leave. Such slaves normally became the property of a neighbor or a family member.<sup>30</sup> James Williams, an escaped slave, recalled how his former owner “took great pains to buy up the wives and husbands of those of his own slaves, who had married out of the estate” before moving to Alabama. The owner wanted to make sure that the two hundred and fourteen slaves who made the trip would be content and would “not need chaining together while on the journey.” Williams, however, did not have to walk to Alabama. Neighboring planters bought him, his wife, his children, and some of the other slaves. Besides selling slaves before migrating, masters also bought them. A Fredericksburg, Virginia, resident advertised his intentions to move to Florida in 1826 and indicated that he wanted to buy a few “likely negroes...for my own use.”<sup>31</sup>

Owners frequently engaged in behavior similar to speculators. They altered the composition of their slave force before they migrated, either by buying more bondservants, selling some of their slaves, or both. Those who moved had a definite

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<sup>29</sup> Ann Patton Malone, *Sweet Chariot: Slave Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana* (Chapel Hill, 1992), p. 211.

<sup>30</sup> Tyrone Power, *Impressions of America during the Years 1833, 1834, and 1835*, 2 vol. (Philadelphia, 1836), 2: 80-83 (quotation); John Melish, *Travels through the United States of America, in the Years 1806 & 1807, and 1809, 1810, & 1811* (London, 1818), p. 341.

<sup>31</sup> James Williams, *Narrative of James Williams, an American Slave* (New York, 1838), p. 37 (first quotation); Fredericksburg, *Virginia Herald*, 30 Aug. 1826 (second quotation).

preference for young slaves, just as speculators did. For instance, John Blakely went through Elbert County, Georgia, on his way to Alabama. The conscientious Blakely, whose slaves were “for the purpose of carrying into the state of Alabama,” registered them with the county clerk as stipulated by the laws of Georgia. He brought twenty-three slaves, the eldest of whom was thirty-five. Fifteen of his slaves were less than sixteen years of age, hardly reflective of the age composition of the southern slave population.<sup>32</sup> Another Alabama settler enlisted his father-in-law in Maryland to buy slaves and send them westward. He gave lengthy directions detailing which slaves he preferred, writing “it is better to buy *none in families*, but to *select only choice, first rate, young hands from 14 to 25 years of age*, (buying no children or aged negroes).”<sup>33</sup> Young slaves normally did not include children, however. William Beverley complained that the children he brought to Alabama were just a “dead expense” because they could not handle the intense labor demands of establishing a new farm. He asked his father to send him young male slaves aged sixteen to twenty who could handle an axe and not succumb to the challenges of the new environment.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Affidavit of John Blakely, 21 Sept. 1833, Slave Importation Register, Elbert County Georgia, Drawer 2, Box 76.

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Knight to William M. Beall, 27 Jan. 1844, Jonathan Knight Papers, Duke. Emphasis in original.

<sup>34</sup> William Beverley to Robert Beverley, 9 June 1831, Beverley Family Papers. Thomas Harrison told his son that it was “out of the question” to waste money on provisions for the women and children, who would be unproductive (Thomas Harrison to James Harrison, 4 Jan. (quotation), 6 Jan. 1836, James T. Harrison Papers, University of North Carolina).

Not all migrants bought or sold slaves and then packed up all their belongings for the westward journey. Others established a type of advance settlement and kept the older slaves in the settled areas. James A. Tait and his father Charles Tait used this method when they moved to Monroe County, Alabama. In 1818 the younger Tait and several slaves started clearing land while the elder Tait stayed in Georgia and grew cotton. Once James Tait had the land in Alabama ready for cultivation, his father sent sixty slaves to him. They cleared more land and put more acreage into cotton production. Tait seemed quite pleased that “two or three more ten year olds” had become seasoned workers and proved able to withstand the hardships of the work at hand. Like most other migrants, the Tait family preferred to stock their new plantation with young slaves, although they brought more bondservants under the age of ten than was customary. Their strategy paid off, though, and they proved to be astute planters. Within three years, Tait had an overseer and a gin house on the Alabama land. The settlement had passed from a rude group of cabins in the wilderness to the beginnings of a plantation.<sup>35</sup> William Beverley, who moved, in part, to escape the “intrusion of rude, disgusting & unprincipled relatives,” found it convenient to leave some of his older slaves at his Virginia plantation because they were “incumbrances.”<sup>36</sup>

The number and proportion of slaves who moved westward with white migrants decreased during the nineteenth century. White emigration to Tennessee, Georgia,

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<sup>35</sup> James Tait to Charles Tait, 21 Jan. 1818 (quotation), 19 Jan. 1919; Charles Tait to James Tait, 14 Oct., 10 Nov. 1818, Tait Family Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

<sup>36</sup> William Beverley to Robert Beverley, 8 June 1829, Beverley Family Papers.

Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana was most numerous in the first two decades of the century. According to one estimate, over 95,000 white residents moved into these seven states in the ten years preceding 1820. The number dropped during the next decade, and then plummeted to just under 40,000 between 1830 and 1840. Table Nine presents the complete statistics.<sup>37</sup>

Even as white migration slowed, the movement of slaves into these same states increased. From 1810 to 1820 almost 50,000 black migrants entered this area. During the next decade the number jumped to over 81,000, and then doubled in the 1830s, a time of extensive growth in the slave trade. The demographic composition of the slaves involved in this great movement also changed. Six out of ten slave migrants in the decade before 1820 were under the age of ten, a figure almost double that of the entire South's population. This percentage dropped steadily over time, especially in the 1830s, but did not reach the southern norm. Slaves aged between ten and twenty in 1820 increased noticeably, while those aged from thirty to forty declined to half of their figure. The full statistics are found in Table Ten.

The change in white migration patterns altered the nature of slave movement. It is probable that before 1820, the majority of slave owners brought their bondservants with them to the edge of settlement rather than moving and then buying from a speculator. White migrants appear to have favored young slaves who would provide a high return on their investment, withstand more work, labor for more years, and eventually produce children. As the newer states became settled and white migration

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<sup>37</sup> The figures for this and the following paragraphs are taken from McClelland and Zeckhauser, *Demographic Dimensions*, pp. 6, 138-43, 159-64.

**Table Nine**  
**Estimated interregional migration of the white population**  
**1810-1840**

Age	0-10	10-20	20-30	30-40	40+	Total
1810-1820						
Old South	-82,368	-55,349	-36,035	-20,957	-28,069	-222,777
Percentage	37.0	24.8	16.2	9.4	12.6	
New South	30,442	28,175	15,066	9,384	12,242	95,309
Percentage	31.2	29.6	15.8	9.8	12.8	
1820-1830						
Old South	-78,768	-52,803	-35,730	-19,834	-25,516	-212,651
Percentage	37.0	24.8	16.8	9.3	12.0	
New South	22,571	31,646	19,660	8,606	7,788	90,271
Percentage	25.0	35.1	21.8	9.5	8.6	
1830-1840						
Old South	-118,297	-97,871	-61,900	-30,545	-35,119	-343,732
Percentage	34.4	28.4	18.0	8.9	10.2	
New South	-6,663	24,495	15,782	4,316	1,775	39,705
Percentage	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	

Old South: Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina

New South: Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana

Age groupings indicate age at the beginning of the decade.<sup>38</sup>

Source: Peter D. McClelland and Richard J. Zeckhauser, *Demographic Dimensions of the New Republic: American Interregional Migration, Vital Statistics, and Manumissions, 1800-1860* (New York, 1982), pp. 138-43.

abated, fewer slaves accompanied their masters to new land. As a result, some masters traveled to Maryland and Virginia to buy additional slaves, while others stayed in the Lower South and purchased slaves from speculators. Slave traders tended not to trade in children under ten years of age, but especially bought and sold slaves between fifteen

<sup>38</sup> The composition of this and the next table have been slightly altered to make them more understandable. Thus, while the original population headings give the age at the end of the decade, I give the age at the beginning. For example, the age range of 10 to 20 years at the end of the decade becomes 0 to 10 at the beginning of the decade. Also, the original tables did not calculate the total migration or the percentage of individuals within each age group.

**Table Ten**  
**Estimated interregional migration of the African-American population**  
**1810-1840**

Age	0-10	10-20	20-30	30-40	40+	Total
1810-1820						
Old South	-36,545	-11,874	-5,623	-6,722	-2,433	-63,197
Percentage	57.8	18.8	8.9	10.6	3.8	
New South	29,868	7,811	4,311	5,059	2,500	49,549
Percentage	54.2	15.8	9.3	10.9	5.0	
1820-1830						
Old South	-49,061	-24,181	-10,002	-3,312	-5,474	-92,030
Percentage	53.3	26.3	10.9	3.6	5.9	
New South	44,208	21,143	8,962	2,531	4,578	81,422
Percentage	54.3	26.0	11.0	3.1	5.6	
1830-1840						
Old South	-84,722	-51,562	-28,962	-12,020	-13,426	-190,962
Percentage	44.4	27.0	15.2	6.3	7.0	
New South	71,179	47,167	5,307	8,812	10,715	163,180
Percentage	43.6	28.9	15.5	5.4	6.6	

Age groupings indicate age at the beginning of the decade.

Old South: Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina

New South: Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana

Source: Peter D. McClelland and Richard J. Zeckhauser, *Demographic Dimensions of the New Republic: American Interregional Migration, Vital Statistics, and Manumissions, 1800-1860* (New York, 1982), pp. 159-64.

and thirty years old.<sup>39</sup> It is this age grouping that gained strength over time, rising from a quarter of the population in the decade after 1810 to forty-five percent in the 1830s.

To put it another way, whites who migrated in 1835 as compared to twenty years earlier probably brought an equivalent ratio of slaves with them to their new land, but the number of bondservants declined because there were fewer white migrants.

Additionally, those whites who were already in the Southwest needed more slaves for cultivation as they expanded their land holdings, so they relied more on speculators.

<sup>39</sup> Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, p. 234.

Rather than being relatively stable in the nineteenth century, the interstate slave trade increased in volume and proportion during the 1820s and 1830s as white migration declined and the demand for labor increased in the Lower South.

Even as speculation grew, a significant number of Lower South planters tried to bypass the interstate slave trade and took on the burden of finding their own slaves in the Upper South. They had a variety of motives, but foremost was the desire to save money. Marius R. Robinson, a Tennessee resident who attended Lane University, took a four-month tour of the South in 1834. He noted that a large number of “respectable planters” from Louisiana went to Maryland and Virginia to buy slaves because they thought it “more profitable.”<sup>40</sup> Such men hoped to save money since it was common knowledge that the prices of slaves in New Orleans and Natchez were significantly higher than the prices in Baltimore, Alexandria, and Richmond. A Louisiana planter went to Virginia to buy slaves because, as he told an observer, the “slave-traders have exacted such a profit upon their slaves, that the planters, when intending to make a considerable purchase, either come to the north [i.e. northern slave states] for the purpose, or employ a factor [who would make the journey for them].” This planter was convinced that avoiding the interstate trade was the only way to drive prices down since “the infamy of the traffic operates to prevent great competition” and kept prices artificially high.<sup>41</sup> Those who bought their own slaves in the Upper South did not

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<sup>40</sup> Ingraham, *The South-West by a Yankee*, 2: 244 (quotations); *Liberator*, 17 May 1834, p. 77.

<sup>41</sup> Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, p. 174.



always find reduced prices, though. A Louisiana sugar planter observed that many Alabama farmers in Richmond returned to their state rather than pay high prices.<sup>42</sup>

Traders obviously made money transporting slaves or they would not have been in the business. The trade's profit rates varied enormously, depending on the time, location, and type of slave being sold. A figure of somewhere between twenty and thirty percent was common in the years between 1820 and 1836, meaning that speculators who brought slaves from Maryland to Louisiana in 1830 added nearly two hundred dollars to the price of the slave. Planters who took on the responsibility of finding their own slaves could save a substantial amount of money, especially since they were likely to buy a significant number of slaves on such a journey.<sup>43</sup> According to one contemporary estimate, such men saved up to half of the total purchase price.<sup>44</sup>

Not all planters from the Deep South, however, were satisfied with their savings. Andrew Durnford traveled from his plantation outside of New Orleans to Richmond in order to buy slaves. After depositing \$8,312 in a local Richmond bank, the free man of color set out to find some bargains. Much to his chagrin, he thought that "people [i.e. slaves] is higher than ever" in Richmond because of all the Deep South planters in the

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<sup>42</sup> Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, 25 June 1835, McDonogh Papers, Howard-Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

<sup>43</sup> Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 204-7, 292-95 has the higher figure, while Freudenberger and Pritchett, "Domestic Slave Trade," contains the lower number. Robert Evans, Jr., "Some Economic Aspects of the Domestic Slave Trade, 1830-1860," *Southern Economic Journal*, 27 (1961): 332, gives a profit rate of forty-five percent. William Calderhead, "Professional Slave Trader," p. 201, estimates a profit rate of fourteen percent. Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 1:70, revise Calderhead's total down to ten percent.

<sup>44</sup> Ingraham, *South-West by a Yankee*, 2: 244.

city. "Even the negro traders," he complained, were "surprised at the prices demanded." Durnford hoped to gain an advantage by acting indifferently and claimed to be traveling to relieve a "liver complaint." When this strategy failed, he pessimistically concluded that he would buy fewer slaves than he intended because other buyers were "committing folies with their money" and driving up the prices. Durnford's overriding concern was to buy slaves at "the lowest market price." Apparently someone accused him of being miserly, for Durnford wrote his friend, "They all say that I wish to have people cheap. I tell them that I must have something for my money, or [I will] send my money back to New Orleans in drafts."<sup>45</sup>

While there were many advantages to purchasing slaves for one's self, the greatest drawback was the problem of bringing them home. Unless a planter bought all of the bondservants at one time, he had to make arrangements to detain his initial purchases. Some hotels and city jails were available for this purpose, especially in the larger trading centers. John W. Smith of the Southern Hotel in Alexandria advertised that his establishment had "every thing necessary" for travelers, including "particular provision for gentlemen from the SOUTHERN COUNTRY, and for the security and support of their servants."<sup>46</sup> Trader's jails could be used for the same purpose, although private citizens tended to shy away from them because of their reputation for disease.

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<sup>45</sup> Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, 9, 25 June, 6 July 1835, McDonogh Papers. For more information on Durnford, see David O. Whitten, *Andrew Durnford: A Black Sugar Planter in the Antebellum South* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1995); and David O. Whitten, "Slave Buying in 1835 Virginia as revealed by the Letters of a Louisiana Sugar Planter," *Louisiana History*, 11 (1970): 231-44.

<sup>46</sup> *Alexandria Phenix Gazette*, 5 Apr. 1825.

Durnford refused to purchase a family of eight because he did not want to put them in a slave jail and risk illness.<sup>47</sup>

Planters who successfully purchased slaves next had to make arrangements to bring the bondservants to their new home. One southerner who had purchased his own slaves advised a friend against using coastwise shipping, which was expensive and risky. He firmly stated, "I am for a Land *Trip*" since the slaves cannot get seasick and it takes just as much time. Two good mules, one or two horses, and a wagon was all that he felt was necessary. He even enclosed a detailed set of directions from Petersburg, Virginia, to Clinton, Mississippi.<sup>48</sup> Others traveled overland because of the paucity of coastwise transportation. Durnford wanted to send his twenty-five slaves to New Orleans via ship, but would have had to wait four months. He did not want to tarry that long nor did he want to leave early and entrust his new purchases to a stranger. Durnford considered traveling to Baltimore and then to Charleston to meet vessels, but concluded that the risk of missing the connection was too great and would place him in a worse situation. He eventually took the advice of a fellow traveler and rented a wagon, bought some horses, and transported his slaves across Virginia to a port on the Ohio River. From there, they floated down to New Orleans. Even though it cost him money he had not planned on spending and took twenty-five days, Durnford had no

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<sup>47</sup> Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, 25 June 1835, McDonogh Papers.

<sup>48</sup> John H. Faulkner to William C. Fitzhugh Powell, 14 Sept. 1835, William C. Fitzhugh Powell Papers, Duke. Emphasis in original.

choice.<sup>49</sup> James Tutt also knew the difficulties of bringing slaves out of Virginia. He warned his father that travel on the Ohio River could be risky and advised him to “keep out a watch on your negroes [because] the abolitionists will take them off.” Tutt thought the only effective strategy to prevent slaves from running away was anchoring away from the shore at night.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the cost and the difficulty in making arrangements, some planters relied on the coastwise trade to transport their slaves. James Byers of Rapides Parish, Louisiana, went to Virginia in 1822 to buy slaves for his plantation. He shipped thirty-seven slaves from Richmond to New Orleans, arriving with them in Louisiana during the first week of February. It is obvious he wanted young slaves, since sixteen of his purchases were less than ten years old and only one was over twenty years of age.<sup>51</sup> Likewise, Wilfred Dent left his Louisiana home and traveled to Maryland to buy slaves in 1827. After purchasing twenty-nine bondservants, twenty of them aged nineteen or less, he loaded them on a ship in Annapolis and sailed for home.<sup>52</sup> Byers, Dent, and others like them were successful in transporting their slaves along the coast because they did so during the height of the slave buying season. Durnford, while he may have

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<sup>49</sup> Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, 10, 15 June, 6 July 1835, John McDonogh Papers.

<sup>50</sup> James Tutt to Richard Tutt, 19 Sept. 1839, James Tutt Papers, Duke.

<sup>51</sup> New Orleans Inward Slave Manifests, Shipment of 2 Feb. 1822.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, Shipment of 7 Jan. 1827. For other examples of planters using the coastwise trade, see the shipments of Stephen Wickoff, 24 Apr. 1822, James Smith, 14 Apr. 1825, and Joseph Chambers, 7 Jan. 1826.

been successful in avoiding the Louisiana heat, waited too far into the year to ensure adequate transportation for his new purchases.

Those planters who did not want to make the arrangements for transporting their slaves could delegate that chore to a family member or trusted friend. When Henry Tayloe needed more slaves, he prevailed upon his brother Benjamin for help. Henry wrote that he wanted no one over the age of forty-five, except for two or three “old” women to cook and a “trustworthy old man” to watch the hogs. If Benjamin had already purchased any old slaves, Henry wanted them exchanged for children “of any age.”<sup>53</sup> When E. B. Vass of Fredericksburg decided to move to Florida, he advertised for someone to “carry out Negroes for me.” He promised to pay “reasonable compensation” to anyone for their efforts.<sup>54</sup> Mark Brown and James Wiles found out the hard way that entrusting one’s slaves to strangers was a risky proposition. They paid John Loflin to transport three newly purchased slaves from Virginia to Augusta, Georgia. When Loflin failed to appear as promised they suspected he had taken the slaves to Mississippi or Louisiana for sale. They offered a liberal reward for Loflin’s arrest.<sup>55</sup>

Planters who traveled to buy slaves encountered other difficulties, as well. Slave traders made most of their purchases in cash or on short credit, which proved to be a great advantage since the slave’s seller did not have to worry about collecting a

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<sup>53</sup> Henry Tayloe to Benjamin Tayloe, 29 July 1839, Tayloe Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

<sup>54</sup> Fredericksburg *Virginia Herald*, 30 Aug. 1826.

<sup>55</sup> Woodville *Republican*, 25 Sept. 1830.

debt. Planters who wanted to compete in the market had to come up with a ready stock of cash. Some left on slave buying trips after selling their crops. Durnford, for instance, sold his sugar before going to Virginia.<sup>56</sup> Planters with sizable holdings could also secure loans to finance their slave buying trips. Ethan Andrews toured the South while doing research for his book on the internal slave trade. While traveling from Washington to Richmond, he fell in with a planter from Louisiana who had just purchased one hundred and fifty-five slaves, “the entire stock of a plantation near Fredericksburg.” The man, who was stocking a new farm in his home state, paid \$75,000 for the bondservants and was somewhat concerned about the amount of money he just spent. He remarked to Andrews that he would soon pay off the loan for his slaves if cotton did not fall below ten cents per pound.<sup>57</sup> Planters who traveled north to buy slaves appear not to have had any difficulties securing enough money to make their trips worthwhile. A northern traveler heard that some brought up to \$20,000 or even \$50,000 with them for purchases.<sup>58</sup>

Judging from newspaper advertisements, there was a significant number of Deep South planters who traveled north to buy slaves. Such men generally reiterated their desire for “likely young negroes,” which meant healthy slaves under twenty-five years

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<sup>56</sup> Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, 9 June 1825, McDonogh Papers. For the ability of traders to pay for their purchases in cash, see Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 52-55.

<sup>57</sup> Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, pp. 171-72.

<sup>58</sup> Ingraham, *South-West by a Yankee*, 2: 244. That figure seems high, given that Durnford, spent \$6,876 on the twenty-five slaves he bought in Richmond (Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, 6 July 1835, McDonogh Papers).

of age.<sup>59</sup> Planters took care to differentiate themselves from traders by emphasizing that any slaves they purchased were for their “own use and *not for sale*.”<sup>60</sup> Many went further and declared they were gentlemen who desired more slaves. For instance, one advertisement described a “*Gentleman* Wishing to purchase a few prime SLAVES for his own use and *not for sale*” who was staying at the Indian Queen Hotel in Baltimore.<sup>61</sup> Planters revealed their identity to gain an advantage when buying slaves. It quickly became known that farmers in Maryland and Virginia treated planters differently than slave traders, especially regarding the price of slaves. Maryland slave owners gained a reputation for having two prices for their bondservants, a “home price” and a speculative price, which was higher. They knew that traders had large amounts of ready cash for the purchase of slaves and they were willing to hike up prices in order to separate speculators from their money. Thomas Culbreth, who lived on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, thought slaves in his county “had two Prices, viz a neighbourhood or domestic and a foreign or Southern price. The domestic Price has generally been about

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<sup>59</sup> For examples, see *Baltimore American*, 1 Nov. 1820, 25 Aug. 1821, 19 Oct. 1822, 3 July 1824; *Easton Republican Star*, 2 July 1822; *Fredericksburg Virginia Herald*, 27 May 1820; and *Norfolk American Beacon*, 8 Jan. 1820.

<sup>60</sup> *Baltimore American*, 25 Aug. 1831. Emphasis in original. For more examples, see *Nashville Whig*, 19 Mar. 1817; *Norfolk American Beacon*, 18 June 1818; *Baltimore American*, 23 Aug. 1820, 29 Oct. 1821, 21 July 1822; *Easton Republican Star*, 2 July 1822, 18 May 1824; *Richmond Enquirer*, 12 July 1825, 20 July 1832, 24 Feb. 1835; and *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 31 May 1826.

<sup>61</sup> *Baltimore American*, 25 Aug. 1821. Emphasis in original. Similar ads are found in *Ibid.*, Oct. 29 1821, 2 July 1822, 21 Aug. 1824; *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 9 July 1820, 11 July 1833; *Richmond Enquirer*, 17 Aug. 1832, 13 Sept. 1833; *Fredericksburg Virginia Herald*, 22 July 1826, *Norfolk American Beacon*, 27 Oct. 1817; and *Alexandria Phenix Gazette*, 11 Jan. 1825.

a third less than the foreign and sometimes the difference amounts to one half.”

Likewise, an advertisement in a Maryland paper notified qualified parties that they could buy a slave for the “home price.”<sup>62</sup>

Planters made good use of another advantage they possessed over speculators: the purchase of slave families rather than individuals. It became well known in the South that traders preferred to buy slaves singly rather than in families or in mixed age groups.<sup>63</sup> Those men who emphasized that they were buying slaves in family units let it be known they wanted to protect the bondservants by ensuring “that their domestic relations may not be broken in upon.”<sup>64</sup> Planters stressed that they would properly take care of any slaves they purchased. One pointed out that any slaves he bought would go to “a healthy situation.” He noted his ability to pay cash for all slaves and emphasized that he “will not be accessory to the separation of the individuals of a family.” Another planter, this one a “GENTLEMAN just arrived from Louisiana,” wanted to purchase fifteen or twenty slaves at a “fair cash price.” He added that the “slaves are for his own use, and to remain on his plantation in Louisiana, and not bought for speculation. He would prefer them in families.”<sup>65</sup> One southerner wanted thirty to one hundred slaves “for his own exclusive use,” informing prospective sellers that he would only buy

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<sup>62</sup> “Estimates of the Value of Slaves,” p. 818 (first quotation); *Cambridge Chronicle*, 24 Dec. 1836, as quoted in Bancroft Papers (second quotation).

<sup>63</sup> Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 52-55.

<sup>64</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, 25 Jan. 1823. For an advertisement with similar wording, see *Ibid.*, 12 July 1825.

<sup>65</sup> *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 6 Apr. 1832 (first and second quotations), 31 May 1826 (remaining quotations).



families from one or two large slave holders.<sup>66</sup> A Virginian who owned an estate in Louisiana wanted forty prime slaves “of good character,” but only those who were “disposed to go.”<sup>67</sup>

Planters who underscored their desire to purchase families of slaves rather than individual bondservants separated themselves from speculators by playing on the paternal pretensions of slave sellers. The claim of preserving family relations was a bit of sophistry, since most slaves, even if they were sold south with their immediate family, left behind aunts, uncles, cousins, or grandparents, not to mention close friends and their homes. The implicit claim of sheltering slave families from speculation was a rather invidious device used by planters to spare prospective sellers from uneasiness. If masters could be persuaded that the sale of their slaves was not so disruptive as might first appear, then those who had misgivings about the process would be more likely to part with their bondservants. Just as importantly, buyers who purchased an entire family could get such slaves at a reduced price since slaves sold singly tended to have a

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<sup>66</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, 17 Jan. 1835. Emphasis in original. A note in the advertisement indicated it was reprinted in papers in Petersburg, Danville, Culpeper, Raleigh, Fayetteville, and Baltimore. See *Ibid.*, 20 July 1832 for another example of a similar advertisement that was widely reprinted.

<sup>67</sup> *Norfolk American Beacon*, 18 June 1818. Most sellers and purchasers had a rather narrow definition of the slave family, considering it to be the mother and her children. According to his surviving letters, Durnford purchased two women and all five of their children. He did consider buying a husband, wife, and their six children, but it is unknown whether he did so (Durnford to McDonogh, 15 and 25 June 1835, McDonogh Papers). His letters give a description of seven of the twenty-five slaves he purchased, although he mentions eighteen others he considered buying. All of the slaves he considered were in family units of mother and children, or mother, father, and children).

higher purchase price than those sold in family units.<sup>68</sup> The “gentlemen” who bought slaves for their own use considered themselves to be engaged in nobler conduct than speculation. Even though their activities mirrored the slave trade, they could convince themselves of their pure motives, especially in comparison to speculators. A gentleman would not destroy families or force slaves to move to the Deep South against their will. The fiction of a benevolent purchaser defined the limits of acceptable behavior in the South and enabled slaveholders to disregard reality in favor of a patronizing illusion of benevolence.

It is unknown how many planters journeyed north to buy slaves, but the number probably was significant.<sup>69</sup> Perry Cohee, a planter in Lawrence County, Mississippi, spent several weeks in Talbot County, Maryland, buying slaves. He purchased a total of sixteen bondservants for \$2,720, including Frederick Douglass’s sister, aunt, and several cousins.<sup>70</sup> When Pryor McNeill moved to Mississippi in 1825, the first thing he noticed was that “the money has nearly all disappeared out of the Country, on account of so many going on to the east to purchase slaves.”<sup>71</sup> Planters in that area so

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<sup>68</sup> Such purchasers, of course, ran the risk of acquiring “unnecessary” bondservants.

<sup>69</sup> Calderhead claimed that planters from the gulf states controlled the market in Maryland until 1822 when more speculators entered the market. He appears to have undercounted the slave traders in his analysis of counties on the Eastern Shore (Calderhead, “Professional Slave Trader,” p. 202).

<sup>70</sup> Land Grant records, Liber 50, September 1831 to August 1833, Maryland Department of Archives and History, Annapolis, Maryland; Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass*, p. 78.

<sup>71</sup> Pryor McNeill to Malcom McNeill, 10 June 1825, Elizabeth Winston Collection, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

commonly made trips to the Chesapeake that one Virginia auction house advertised in a Natchez paper. It notified Mississippi planters that a judicial decree would force it to sell at least one hundred and fifty slaves at Royallton Mills, about forty miles from Richmond.<sup>72</sup> Many of those who traveled north to buy slaves took pains to ensure they were not confused with slave traders. Benjamin Ballard and Samuel T. Barnes of Halifax, North Carolina, sent a total of two hundred and twenty-four slaves from Norfolk to New Orleans in 1819. "The owner of these slaves," Ballard wrote in the margin of the slave manifest, "is moving to the parish of St. Landry near Opelousas where he has purchased lands and intends settling, and is not a dealer in human flesh." Barnes made a similar notation discounting any connection with the interstate trade.<sup>73</sup>

Not even the Nat Turner rebellion of 1831 deterred planters from buying slaves in Virginia. If there was some reluctance on the part of Deep South residents to buy from slave traders, there was no decrease in the numbers of planters who went north to buy slaves. Thomas R. Dew observed that even though Mississippi and Louisiana, the two largest purchasers of Chesapeake slaves, passed laws prohibiting traders from importing slaves, prices rose instead of fell. He attributed the rise in prices to "the number of southern purchasers who have visited our State."<sup>74</sup> Lewis Sewall of

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<sup>72</sup> Natchez *Mississippi State Gazette*, 5 Sept. 1818.

<sup>73</sup> Slave manifests, as quoted in Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 182.

<sup>74</sup> Dew, *Review of the Debate*, p. 361 (quotation); Faust, ed., *Ideology of Slavery*, p. 32. Dew mistakenly described the Louisiana law one as one that prohibited the entry of all slaves when it specifically barred speculators from bringing slaves into the state for resale (*New Orleans Courier*, 19 Nov. 1831; *New Orleans Bee*, 19 Nov. 1831; *New Orleans Louisiana Advertiser*, 19 Nov. 1831; Joe Gray Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1963), p. 42; Judith Kelleher Schafer, "The

Alabama wanted his friend to forward a copy of a newspaper containing his state's law. He was concerned that the measure would be as strict as Louisiana's and feared that he could not employ an agent to go and buy slaves on his behalf. Should that be the case, Sewall was ready. He had no plans to evade the laws, since he attached "more solemnity to a legal oath, than *custom-house officers* usually do." Even though Sewall did not have to travel, enough planters made the trip that a newspaper cautioned Alabama travelers in Maryland to make certain they did not buy kidnapped blacks or slaves of bad character.<sup>75</sup> Joseph Ingraham, who visited the Natchez slave market in 1834, learned that the phrase "'he is gone to Virginia to buy negroes,' or 'niggers,' as is the elegant and equally common phraseology, is as often applied to a temporarily absent planter, as 'he is gone to Boston to buy goods,' to a New-England country merchant."<sup>76</sup>

Slave traders in the Upper South recognized that they competed with planters. Concerning a potential Alabama importation ban, Isaac Franklin warned fellow speculator Rice C. Ballard in Richmond to expect more southern planters than usual if the law passed. Franklin feared that if the Alabama legislature passed the measure, planters who wanted to "Introduce any slaves at all must go after them in person." As a result, he told Ballard, the planters "will in all human probability carry the trade" to Richmond, Alexandria, Norfolk, and Baltimore. If a good crop is harvested, Franklin

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Immediate Impact of Nat Turner's Insurrection on New Orleans," *Louisiana History*, 21 (1980): 367-68).

<sup>75</sup> Lewis Sewall to James Dellet, 4 Jan. 1832, James Dellet Papers, Container 3, Folder 7, Alabama Department of Archives and History (quotation, emphasis in original); Huntsville *Southern Advocate*, 4 Feb. 1832.

<sup>76</sup> Ingraham, *South-West by a Yankee*, 2: 234.

warned Ballard to be ready because “they will come on in Droves.”<sup>77</sup> A reader of the *Natchez Ariel* knew that it was both profitable and beneficial for planters to go to Maryland or Virginia to buy slaves. They would pay half the Mississippi price and reduce the risk of buying slaves of questionable character. If a planter only wanted one or two slaves, then he could unite with a few other buyers and “send a trusty agent, with instructions to purchase negroes of good character, not convicts, the inhabitants of jails, drunkards, rogues and vagabonds.”<sup>78</sup>

Slave traders recognized the serious nature of their competition with planters and tried to take advantage of the situation. Franklin, the most famous speculator of his day, knew that Louisiana planters were a common sight in Virginia. He wrote his agent in Richmond that he “would be pleased to hear of your making some good sales to the La planters.”<sup>79</sup> Enough Deep South residents came through Richmond that trader James McFall advertised in seven newspapers of Louisiana and Mississippi. He notified “*Southern Merchants, Planters, Manufacturers*” that he would take their orders ahead of time and have the slaves ready, along with all “legal vouchers, guarantees, &c.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 28 Feb. 1831, Ballard Papers. In the same letter, Franklin told Ballard that if planters flooded the market, “we will have a chance to retaliate,” probably by lowering prices.

<sup>78</sup> Undated *Natchez Ariel*, as quoted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 4 July 1827, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 8 June 1832, Rice C. Ballard Papers.

<sup>80</sup> New Orleans *Bee*, 21 Dec. 1833. Emphasis in original. According to the notice, McFall also advertised in the New Orleans *Louisiana Advertiser*, Donaldsonville (Louisiana) *Eagle*, Natchez *Courier*, Vicksburg *Advocate*, Port Gibson (Mississippi) *Correspondent*, Covington (Louisiana) *Palladium*, and St. Francisville (Louisiana) *Phoenix*.

Lewis Collier let it be known to “Persons from the Southern States, wanting to buy a choice lot of slaves” would do well to visit him since he had a large number of slaves on hand. He noted his “comfortable rooms with a jail attached for the reception of Negroes” for those planters who made purchases.<sup>81</sup> James Hutcherson, a speculator who made Alexandria his base of operations, indicated that in addition to buying slaves, he “will also visit persons who may be strangers in the market, in the purchase of such property.” He recognized the large numbers of planters who journeyed north, and rather than competing directly with them in purchasing slaves, tried to take advantage of their inexperience. On one occasion, Hutcherson made arrangements for the purchase of “a few likely negroes...for the individual use of a gentleman living in Arkansas Territory, and who is now in Washington city doing some business in Congress.” In case prospective purchasers were skeptical, Hutcherson assured them that “the most satisfactory references can be given that the servants wanted are not for sale.”<sup>82</sup>

Speculators needed to assure a skeptical public of their veracity. Even though some traders assisted planters, others tried to pass themselves off as planters. Many speculators swore that the slaves they bought were for their own use, rather than for speculation. There is the assumption in their notices that buying slaves for one’s self was somehow better than buying them for resale. David Harding, a trader, tried to fool

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<sup>81</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, 19 Mar. 1833. See also Collier’s similar ad in *Ibid.*, 23 Sept. 1833.

<sup>82</sup> *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 3 July 1827 (first quotation); *Easton Republican Star*, 18 May 1824 (second quotation). In this advertisement, Hutcherson’s first name is given as John. See *Richmond Enquirer*, 10 Dec. 1831, for Abner Robinson’s similar advertisement.

the residents of Richmond by advertising that the slaves he bought were for his own use.<sup>83</sup> Austin Woolfolk, who was too well known as a speculator to conceal his identity, tried to get good prices by indicating his desire to purchase fifty or sixty slaves “part of which is for his own use, and for which he will give the highest possible price.” He also advertised for “fifty NEGROES, of different descriptions...for a cotton plantation.”<sup>84</sup> Whether such efforts were successful or not is beside the point, since traders tried to use the presence of planters in the Upper South’s slave markets to their advantage. They quickly realized the possibilities of pretending to buy for a third party or themselves. It was more acceptable to sell a slave to a private citizen than to a slave trader because the transaction was not based, southerners convinced themselves, on speculation. Without the speculative element, slaveholders purified the master-slave relationship and could believe that slavery was a benevolent institution. Gentlemen could then buy and sell slaves without concern for the consequences of their actions. Traders tried to portray themselves as part of this gentry. One suspicious advertisement called attention to the fact that “A Gentleman wishing to purchase a few SLAVES, for his individual use, and not for sale” will give “CASH, *And the highest prices.*” The man gave no other information other than directing prospective sellers to a boarding house in Baltimore.<sup>85</sup> Such an ad may have been placed by a planter, but the

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<sup>83</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, 8 June 1821.

<sup>84</sup> *Baltimore American*, 9 Nov. 1824; *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 9 Aug. 1825.

<sup>85</sup> *Baltimore American*, 20 Feb. 1822. See *Ibid.*, 9 Sept. 1822; *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 4 June 1828; and Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, p. 32 for other shady advertisements.

phraseology is reminiscent of a trader, especially the emphasis on the highest prices. This advertiser also described himself as a “Gentleman.” Planters tried to distinguish themselves from speculators by using that term, and its frequent use in the advertisements for private purchasers suggest a gulf between planters and traders. Speculators were well aware that they were not “gentlemen,” even if they did make purchases on behalf of planters. A trader in Mississippi, for example, felt the sting of being ignored by a Methodist minister and knocked off the preacher’s hat for “not speaking to a gentleman.”<sup>86</sup>

While southern “gentlemen” may have distanced themselves from the activities of slave traders, it was not so easy to separate the activities of the two. Planters who purchased slaves before setting out for new territory in the expanding west would not consider their slaves to be subject to the slave trade, although such bondservants were purchased with the express purpose of being moved to the west. Likewise, planters who traveled to Maryland or Virginia and purchased slaves would not have considered themselves as contributing to the slave trade, although their activities had the same net effect as speculation. The different types of slave movement, moreover, came from similar motives, even if the actual means of carrying them out varied. Economic rationality bounded the decisions. Masters who brought bondservants with them when migrating and those who traveled north to buy slaves made economic decisions. Slave owners were trying to acquire the most productive bondservants and shape their labor force to their specific needs. Their behavior was speculative in nature, although they

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<sup>86</sup> John Jones Journal, p. 76, manuscript in Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



had difficulty admitting as such. Masters, of course, would not have compared themselves to a slave speculator. They made a careful and calculated distinction between the activities of a slave trader who sold slaves expressly for profit and the slave owner who occasionally bought or sold bondservants. Many owners believed they had the best interest of the slave at heart in such transactions and assumed the slave trader was only looking out for his own interest. The reality was much more complex. While there were owners who were genuinely concerned with sparing the feelings of their slaves, the majority acted with their own self-interest in mind. That they needed a foil upon which to project the unseemly portions of slavery is not surprising, since the “gentlemen” engaged in much the same activities as most slave traders.

### Chapter Three

When the charter members of the American Colonization Society met in Washington in 1816, they wanted to find a prominent slaveholder to serve as the organization's first president. Their choice of Bushrod Washington, most thought, was an inspired one. He was the nephew of the country's first president and a Virginia slaveholder who could bring instant credibility to the organization. The A.C.S. was a precarious coalition of slave-owning southerners and anti-slavery northerners that advocated the transfer of emancipated slaves and contraband Africans to Africa. Official statements of the A.C.S. expressed the hope that slaves would voluntarily go overseas, but privately many members were willing to deport not only bondservants, but free African-Americans as well. The A.C.S. hoped to smother the peculiar institution by gradually reducing the number slaves while simultaneously eliminating the nation's black population.<sup>1</sup>

Colonization tended to flourish in the Upper South because it was a moderate compromise with slavery. Many from this area who joined the organization thought slavery worked against the best interests of the United States because it was

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<sup>1</sup> P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York, 1961); Early Lee Fox, *The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840* (Baltimore, 1919); Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1975), pp. 200-12; John G. West, Jr., *The Politics of Revelation and Reason: Religion and Civic Life in the New Nation* (Lawrence, Kan., 1996), pp. 110-12. Besides Washington, prominent southerners present at the creation of the A.C.S. were John Randolph, Richard Bland Lee, Robert Wright, Robert Goldsborough, and Henry Clay. The actual name of the A.C.S. was the American Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color.

economically unsound and potentially dangerous. The *Richmond Enquirer*, for instance, strongly backed colonization by pointing to “*our languishing agriculture, our deserted farms, our decayed fortunes, our decreasing population.*” It concluded that the slaves were a “*curse to the land*” and should be removed by deportation to Africa.

Banishing bondservants from the state would revive agriculture while relieving white fears that exhausted lands left slaves with too much free time on their hands.<sup>2</sup> Others in the Upper South supported the organization because they thought it lessened the suffering of slaves. Rather than viewing bondservants primarily as a potential threat to society, such people empathized with their plight. They wanted to remove the stigma of slavery and set the captives free, provided, of course, the former slaves were transported from the limits of the United States. These people made provisions in their wills for their bondservants to be emancipated and often provided money to pay for deportation. They felt that giving their slaves to the government was preferable to keeping them enslaved. At the very least, slaves were free, families were preserved, and individuals had the opportunity to start anew in Africa.<sup>3</sup>

Washington, who lived at Mount Vernon, ostensibly shared many of these same attitudes. He ran into financial difficulties, however, much as his uncle had. Like many other plantations in Virginia, the production of his estate failed to meet the demands of

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<sup>2</sup> Undated *Richmond Enquirer*, as quoted in Huntsville *Southern Advocate*, 10 Dec. 1825. Emphasis in original.

<sup>3</sup> Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, pp. 113-16; Fox, *American Colonization Society*, pp. 194-211. George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York, 1971), pp. 11-12, discounts any feelings of humanity for the slave on the part of those who joined the A.C.S.

his spending. In 1821 Washington took a drastic step to buoy his declining fortune by selling fifty-four slaves to two men from Louisiana. He netted \$10,000 on the transaction. Washington knew he had to keep the sale a secret lest he damage his reputation as president of the A.C.S. His hopes were in vain. The transportation of slaves was difficult to conceal, and someone spotted Washington's bondservants trudging through Leesburg, Virginia, in chains. A local paper printed an account of Washington's "unhappy wretches" passing through the town in the midst of a coffle of one hundred slaves. Others picked up the story and soon Washington was under attack by newspapers along the Chesapeake seaboard, with the implication being that he sold his slaves to speculators. The Baltimore *Morning Chronicle* accused Washington of separating families. Pronouncing him "guilty of selling (for the sake of hoarding up wealth)," it demanded an explanation.<sup>4</sup>

Washington shot back with an angry letter defending his actions. He charged that no one had the right to question his authority to "dispose of property" which was lawfully his. Not only were his actions perfectly legal, he continued, but he resented the accusation that he had separated families. Washington took great pains to avoid such unhappy occasions, he said, and made sacrifices to keep families together. Not only did he sell the slaves for \$2,500 less than their market price, but "those who were sold

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<sup>4</sup> *Niles' Weekly Register*, 1 Sept., 1821, pp. 1-2; (first quotation); Baltimore *Morning Chronicle*, 25 Aug. 1822, as quoted in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Aug. 1822, pp. 25-26 (second quotation); *Liberator*, 22 Mar. 1834, p. 45; Gerald T. Dunne, "Bushrod Washington and the Mount Vernon Slaves," *Supreme Court Historical Society Yearbook*, (1980): 25-29; Sweig, "Northern Virginia Slavery," p. 234; Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, p. 173. Washington averaged about \$185 per slave in the sale, significantly below the market price of approximately \$700 (Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 370).

carried with them no feelings of despondency or regret” and “cheerfully consented” to go with their new purchasers after being assured they would have a good owner. Furthermore, he sold the slaves to “two gentleman of Louisiana” who lived on the Red River. The new owners, Mr. Sprigg and Mr. Williams, “meant to place them [the slaves] upon their own estates, and to keep them together.” With this statement, Washington denied any involvement in the interstate slave trade. The slaves were not subject to speculation by resale, but were merely being transferred to another part of the country. He claimed, moreover, that the actions of the slaves justified their sale. The final straw was the “insubordination of my negroes, [and] their total disregard of all authority” that rendered them useless. Once Washington told the slaves he would never emancipate them, three tried to escape and he feared that all his other laboring men would try similar schemes.<sup>5</sup>

Washington’s actions were legal, and if his account is correct, he did his best to prevent his slaves from falling into the clutches of speculators. The sale, however, seemed similar to speculation. One hundred slaves marching in chains brought to mind images of the slave trade rather than willing bondservants merrily moving south. Moreover, when the president of American Colonization Society succumbed to the temptation to sell his slaves to the Deep South rather than provide for their transportation to Africa, it was apparent that the movement was deeply troubled. Supporters of the A.C.S. realized the threat that the slave trade posed to their organization. The surfeit of buyers in the Upper South, including slave traders and

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<sup>5</sup> *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 29 Sept. 1821, pp. 70-72 (quotations); *Liberator*, 22 Mar. 1834, p. 45.

planters from Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana, kept slave prices artificially high. These inflated prices undermined the A.C.S. and made it less tempting for owners to emancipate their bondservants. In 1828 and 1830 colonizationists in Kentucky, for instance, pushed for bills that would have outlawed the domestic slave trade in their state. They portrayed non-importation as the first step to getting rid of slavery since it would make slave property less valuable. In 1830 the bill failed by one vote, but passed in 1833.<sup>6</sup>

Despite Kentucky's example, few looked to federal or state governments to take action. Most people registered their disapproval through individual efforts that had no direction or cohesion. They refused to deal with speculators, looked askance at their neighbors who did not do so, and denounced the most offensive aspects of the trade. Those who opposed speculation offered no viable alternative to a commerce that was becoming vital to the South's expansion. This unfocused sentiment shied away from extreme solutions but hoped that the slave trade, and possibly slavery itself, would somehow go away. Southerners who harbored doubts about servitude, no matter how small, were most likely to be troubled by the interstate slave trade. Those who did not believe in slavery absolutely could not believe in the absolute power of the slaveholder.

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<sup>6</sup> *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, Feb. 1830, p. 380; Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, pp. 147-68; Lowell H. Harrison, *The Antislavery Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington, 1978), p. 47. Authorities generally ignored the measure, although see Christopher Waldrep, "Kentucky's Slave Importation Law in Lyon County: A Document," *Filson Club Historical Quarterly*, 65 (1991): 505-12. For a similar analysis of the slave trade's effect on colonization, see [Harrison], *Review of the Slave Question*, p. 32.

Their conditional acceptance of slavery did not include unqualified approval of the slave trade.<sup>7</sup>

In the first three decades of the nineteenth century the Upper South possessed a deep ambivalence towards the interstate slave trade. The trade's naked commercialism seemed to contradict many of the justifications for slavery. Instead of providing food, clothing, and shelter in exchange for a slave's labor, masters who utilized the trade profited while bondservants suffered. Speculation seemed to violate the idea of an implied agreement between master and slave. Owners profited from the exchange while bondservants suffered. Auctions and coffles revealed the depths of slaves' agony and became powerful reminders of speculation's brutal consequences.<sup>8</sup> As the trade grew it became more difficult for citizens to avoid the unpleasant conclusion that it was undermining the foundations of good society. In the states where large numbers of slaves were sold, citizens became dismayed at the blatant exploitation of the trade.

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<sup>7</sup> Similarly, southerners who actively opposed slavery hated the interstate slave trade. See *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 1 Aug. 1822, p. 22, 2 Sept. 1826, p. 413; William Birney, *James G. Birney and His Times* (New York, 1890), pp. 57-58; Carl Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1974), pp. 40-41; Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, pp. 209-10; H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image but... Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (Durham, 1972), pp. 70-71; Gordon E. Finnie, "The Antislavery Movement in the Upper South before 1840," *Journal of Southern History*, 35 (1969): 319-42; William M. Boyd, "Southerners in the Anti-Slavery Movement, 1800-1830," *Phylon*, 9 (1948): 153-63; and Asa E. Martin, "The Anti-Slavery Societies in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, 1 (1915): 269-70.

<sup>8</sup> James L. Huston, "The Experiential Basis of the Northern Antislavery Impulse," *Journal of Southern History*, 56 (1990): 609-40. While Huston speaks about how the sight of slave auctions galvanized northerners against slavery, his discussion influences this section. Southern citizens, at least for a time, also reacted to slave sales and coffles. Their reactions were not as vehement as those found in Huston's work because residence in a slave society bounded their thinking.

They had difficulty embracing the ways in which speculators reduced slavery to a crude measure of profit and often felt traders were inhuman brutes who were associated with illegal activities. Many citizens of the Upper South feared that the trade degraded those who came in contact with it. Slaves, obviously, felt the trade's sting most keenly, but speculation also had the potential to corrupt whites. There were concerns that as the trade degraded individuals, government itself could be threatened. A significant number of owners responded by refusing to sell their slave to speculators in the hopes of keeping slave families together. Southerners even allowed the trade's efficacy to be debated in the House of Representatives. Before 1830, then, there was widespread concern in the Upper South about the interstate slave trade's negative effects on society.

There were specific reasons why southerners found the interstate slave trade to be unpalatable. In those states that exported slaves, coffles were tangible reminders of slavery's brutality and the speculator's inhumanity. A Bourbon County, Kentucky, slave owner described his first encounter with a coffle as something "more shocking to humanity than any that has ever come within my notice." Indeed, for those who prided themselves on their enlightened treatment of slaves, the presence of a slave coffle was almost scandalous. The sight of nearly one hundred slaves "Chained and guarded . . . driven like other stock, from their native land" was something that ran counter to this man's belief that the slave owner had a duty to protect his bondservants from the worst abuses of the institution.<sup>9</sup> Not only were the sights of manacled slaves offensive, but

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<sup>9</sup> Paris (Kentucky) *Western Citizen*, 24 Sept. 1822, as quoted in J. Winston Coleman Papers, King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky (quotation); *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Nov. 1822, p. 59.



the image of a slave driver on horseback with a whip or a gun was particularly appalling. Eyewitnesses commonly reported seeing slaves chained together with their white drivers riding alongside them carrying “whips and pistols.”<sup>10</sup> A man who would treat slaves in this fashion could hardly be expected to harbor a virtuous character, according to those who disliked the trade. Slave owners who refused to sell to a trader made an implicit judgment that speculators had lost their essential humanity. In this view, only a man “stepped by avarice and petrified by cruelty” would remain unmoved by the “shrieks and groans” of slaves who had been sold from their relatives.<sup>11</sup> That slave traders denied the slaves’ essential humanity was a notion that became prevalent amongst southerners. A resident of Loudoun County, Virginia, complained that “inhuman traders” had recently appeared in the area.<sup>12</sup> Richard H. Carter of Rectortown, Virginia harbored the same feelings. He wrote to George Kephart, a slave trader in Alexandria, for a favor. Kephart’s agent bought a slave woman whose husband, Carter explained, “lives with me.” He wanted to buy the woman, named Mima, but already had more slaves than he wanted. Carter recognized that he was “induced to make an appeal to your humanity,” and asked to pay Kephart less than

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<sup>10</sup> William H. Blane, *An Excursion through the United States and Canada during the years 1822-23* (1824; reprint, New York, 1969), p. 226.

<sup>11</sup> “American Convention [of] Abolition Societies, Minutes, 1828,” *Journal of Negro History*, 6 (1921): 328.

<sup>12</sup> Reprint of a “Letter from a gentleman” dated 10 Mar. 1828, as quoted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 29 Mar. 1828, p. 75. See also *Fredericksburg Virginia Herald*, 29 Sept. 1818; *Easton Republican Star*, 25 Sept. 1821; and Charles Grier Sellers, “The Travail of Slavery,” in Charles Grier Sellers, ed., *The Southerner as American* (Chapel Hill, 1960), p. 60.

market value for Mima. He fully understood that “such cannot be your usual way of doing business,” but “must proceed from a motive of humanity” rather than the strictly commercial nature of the trade. It is unknown whether Carter succeeded in buying Mima at a discounted price, or even if he acquired the woman, but his motives were in stark contrast to Kephart’s way of doing business. Twice Carter appealed to Kephart’s “humanity,” as if to stress to the slave trader that somewhere deep inside of him there was an impulse that could also see the objects of his speculation as human.<sup>13</sup>

Another reason to regard traders as brutes was the widespread perception that most, if not all, of them were involved in a particularly unsavory aspect of bondage—kidnapping. It became increasingly common to hear stories of the sale of slaves with a term of years to serve, sometimes called apprentices, and the abduction and sale of free blacks. Kidnapping grew in direct proportion to the interstate slave trade and the two quickly became intertwined, both in practice and in public perception.<sup>14</sup> A Baltimore resident complained that the “horrid practice of kidnapping” had become prevalent. He linked the illegal activities to the slave trade when he complained how Maryland residents saw “almost daily, negroes chained together like oxen, driven through the country by a set of men, who speculate on the miseries of the human race.” The intense demand led to the formation of a “a line of kidnappers” that ran from Philadelphia,

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<sup>13</sup> Moncure D. Conway, *Testimonies Concerning Slavery* (London, 1864), pp. 24-25.

<sup>14</sup> Carol Wilson, *Freedom at Risk: The Kidnapping of Free Blacks in America, 1780-1865* (Lexington, 1994) has the most extensive discussion of kidnapping. She, however, does not explicitly link the rise of kidnapping to the development of a vigorous interstate slave trade. See especially, pp. 11-13, 52.

through Delaware, and into Maryland.<sup>15</sup> One of these “avaricious and unprincipled” criminals was Patty Cannon, ringleader of the most notorious band of kidnappers in the United States. Cannon, her husband, and her sons stole free African-Americans, slaves with a limited time to serve, and slaves from Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. Gang members used peaches to lure young black children and then seized and sold them. They used Cannon’s house as a base of operations, chaining their unfortunate victims in the basement until selling them. The house was actually composed of several different buildings that were reputedly built on different sides of the state line between Maryland and Delaware, and the boundary between counties within Delaware. When authorities threatened, the gang moved across the state or county line, “thus eluding the officers of justice by suddenly passing beyond their jurisdictions.” Only when the gang’s leader stood trial for murdering a slave trader from Georgia and killing three African-American children was the gang put out of business.<sup>16</sup> The arrest and conviction were unusual, since, in general, the laws for enforcement of kidnapping were defective and enforcement of them even worse.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Undated Baltimore *American*, as quoted in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Mar. 1822, p. 441.

<sup>16</sup> Isaac Briggs to Timothy Pickering, 5 June 1817, Records of the Select Committee on the African Slave Trade, National Archives (quotation). Wilson, *Freedom at Risk*, pp. 20-37 traces the exploits of the Cannon-Johnson gang. Only two of its members were convicted of kidnapping. One, a white man, was whipped and forced to stand in the pillory, while the other, an African-American, was fined four thousand dollars and sentenced to forty-two years in prison. See also M. Sammy Miller, “Patty Cannon: Murderer and Kidnapper of Free Blacks: A Review of the Evidence,” *Maryland Historical Magazine*, (1977): 419-23.

<sup>17</sup> Examples of kidnappers being caught and punished may be found in *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 28 June 1828, p. 234; *Woodville Republican*, 6 May 1826; *Genius of*

The fact that kidnappers could operate with virtual impunity tempted slave traders to combine illegal activities with their legal transactions. In Delaware, slave traders broke into the houses of free blacks at night and carried them off.<sup>18</sup> It was well known that kidnapped individuals could be found alongside slaves in the pens of Baltimore and Washington. Slave dealers in those cities were said to use stratagems to distract free African-Americans, who were then “dragged by force” into the slave jails.<sup>19</sup> Speculators of this ilk created confusion in the minds of many, who assumed that all traders must be crooked. The legal and illegal trade became hopelessly mixed for most people. A grand jury in Alexandria, Virginia, complained of “the practice of persons coming from distant parts of the United States for the purpose of purchasing slaves.” Scenes of “wretchedness, and human degradation” in which parents were “wrested from their offspring, and children from their parents, without respect to the ties of nature” were disgraceful. The complaint specifically referred to “the practice of making sale of black people, who are, by the will of their masters, designed to be free at the expiration of a term of years.” This “class of beings,” the grand jury felt, was “entitled to our protection, by the laws of justice and humanity.” The grand jury’s

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*Universal Emancipation*, 20 May 1826, p. 298-99; and *Huntsville Southern Advocate*, 1 Aug. 1828.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, *Freedom at Risk*, p. 52; Walter C. Clephane, “The Local Aspect of Slavery in the District of Columbia,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Association*, 3 (1900): 235; *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 19 July 1817, p. 323. For one example of how a slave trader kidnapped a free black, see Solomon Northrup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, edited by Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge, 1968).

<sup>19</sup> July Term of the Grand Jury of Baltimore, 1816, Select Committee...on the Illegal Traffic in Slaves.

pronouncement did not clearly distinguish between the legal and illegal sale of slaves, but mixed the two together in the hopes of putting an end to both types of distasteful commerce. By not differentiating between the legal and illegal strands of the trade, the grand jury was typical of most attacks on kidnapping.<sup>20</sup>

The growing number of abduction stories firmly linked slave traders with kidnappers in most people's minds. Not everyone who sold slaves was involved in illegal activity, obviously, but all kidnappers utilized the interstate trade since they eventually had to sell their victims. In the eyes of many observers, abductions and the legitimate sale of slaves were virtually identical and separating the two was impossible or pointless. Traders and kidnappers were both involved in the buying, selling, and movement of African-Americans. The inhuman and underhanded components of the illegal trade were imputed to the legal trade, making speculation even more objectionable. A grand jury in Baltimore resented the growth of kidnapping and noted how it "necessarily attaches itself to the Slave Trade."<sup>21</sup> The most effective way to eliminate abduction would be to control the interstate trade. Jesse Torrey understood the link between the two. In a vigorous attack on slavery in the nation's capital, Torrey

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<sup>20</sup> Washington grand jury, as quoted in Mary Tremain, *Slavery in the District of Columbia* (1892; reprint, New York, 1969), pp. 49-50 (quotations). See also William Miner's speech in *Debates and Proceedings*, Twentieth Congress, Second Session, 7 Jan. 1829, pp. 177-78. For versions of this document that omit the references to kidnapping, see Theodore D. Weld and James Thome, *Slavery and the Internal Slave Trade in the United States of North America* (London, 1844), pp. 205-6; Jay, *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 155; Alexandria *Phenix Gazette*, 22 June 1827; Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South*, pp. 23-24; and Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>21</sup> July Term of the Grand Jury of Baltimore, 1816, Select Committee...on the Illegal Traffic in Slaves; Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, pp. 230-31.

described the unholy alliance between abduction and the slave trade. The “*uncontrolled slave trade*, between the middle and southerly states” was the root of the problem. It “gives facility to the extensive and increasing practice of kidnapping, (slaves as well as freemen,) and secures it from the possibility of detection, except casually.” Here Torrey explicitly linked the growth of the legal sale of slaves to the increase in the illegal kidnapping trade.<sup>22</sup>

The assumption that slave traders were brutes who dabbled in illegal behavior was concomitant with the notion that the pecuniary nature of the trade polluted the master-slave relationship by introducing a foreign element: speculation. Most people raised few objections to masters who bought or sold slaves when such transactions were motivated by necessity. Slaveholders had the right to sell slaves in the case of death, debt, or insolvency, but even then, as the case of Bushrod Washington demonstrates, their actions could be reckoned as a betrayal of the master’s implied duty to protect the slave. With an increasingly aggressive interstate slave trade, masters who sold to speculators had difficulty convincing themselves they were acting in a paternalistic fashion that was in the best interests of their slaves. James Birney, for instance, in his attack on the interstate trade, did not condemn slaveholders for buying or selling their slaves in good faith. He only decried the “commerce” in human beings. The notion of taking a profit from the unnecessary misfortune of others lay at the heart of this type of

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<sup>22</sup> Torrey, *Portraiture of Domestic Slavery*, p. 31. Emphasis in the original. He was one of the few to clearly distinguish between the legal and illegal trades. His views may also be seen in Select Committee...on the Illegal Traffic in Slaves.

opposition to the slave trade.<sup>23</sup> Speculation in slaves, which seemed new given its vigorous growth in the early republic, forced southerners to re-examine slavery, an old institution. The trade's increasing visibility was a pungent reminder that slaveholders were enmeshed in a system of profit which exploited the slave. Owners became increasingly tempted to sell slaves for gain, rather than for necessity such as debt or discipline. In a very real sense, the growth of the interstate slave trade caused a reappraisal of the master-slave relationship because it made clear a facet of the institution to which most southerners would rather not admit, namely, that slavery, at its heart, was cruel. Those who sold slaves to a speculator could hardly claim to be benevolent when it was widely believed that traders broke up families and banished bondservants to a life of misery. A thriving trade belied slaveholders' attempts to defend slavery as something that was good for the slave as well as for the owner. To tolerate and accept a robust slave trade, southerners had either to change their assumptions about the slave trade or their attitudes toward slavery itself.

Disgust with speculation fed into the notion that the interstate trade threatened republican government. A Kentucky resident grimly noted his experience with the slave auctions on the courthouse steps, "the seat of justice." The trader who bought these particular bondservants forced one of them to carry an American flag, something the writer thought abhorrent because his forefathers "fought and bled for liberty and independence." He shrewdly linked the situation of the slaves to the symbols of justice (the courthouse), and liberty (the flag) to show how unbridled commerce trampled on

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<sup>23</sup> Birney, *James G. Birney*, pp. 57-58.

the country's ideals.<sup>24</sup> Another writer, styling himself the "TRUE VIRGINIAN," contrasted his ability to vote with the presence of a slave coffer. He likened the power of a slave holder to sell his slaves as an "absolute and oppressive" tyranny that was worse than any "political despotism in the world." Just as a political system could become extreme and abusive, so too could the institution of slavery. While this Virginian did not suggest an alternative to the slave trade, he implied that there must be a way to guard against the extreme abuses of slavery. He explicitly denied that abolition was the answer. "[K]nocking off the shackles of a slave," he thought, would be more evil than the trade itself because it would turn loose "a vagrant and a thief" who was not ready for freedom. He had no answer for the problem of the slave trade except to encourage good citizens to resist getting caught up in speculation. The lesson to be learned was that not only was unbridled speculation bad for the slave, but it also corrupted the master and could lead to society's collapse.<sup>25</sup>

That the interstate slave trade clashed with the notion of a free government was most prominent in the nation's capital. Edward Coles, a Virginian who later moved to Illinois so that he would not have to live in a slave society, saw coffles march through the streets of Washington. He described the trade as "a scene of wretched and human degradation disgraceful to our characters as citizens of a free government." As James Madison's secretary, Coles reminded the president of the effects that such a "revolting

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<sup>24</sup> Paris (Kentucky) *Western Citizen*, 24 Sept. 1822, as quoted in Coleman Papers. Portions are also reprinted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Nov. 1822, pp. 59-60. The trader described in this account was probably Edward Stone, a notable speculator who made Paris his base of operations.

<sup>25</sup> Lexington (Virginia) *Intelligencer*, 16 Aug. 1823.



sight” would have on foreign dignitaries. Apparently his protestations elicited no response.<sup>26</sup> A few years later, when President Andrew Jackson and his cabinet marched to celebrate the French Revolution, a slave coffle trudged the other way. A Washington newspaper noted that such “shocking scenes” of the slave trade had to be prevented or “we must cease to call ourselves free.” The paper wondered “Oh patriotism! where is thy indignation? Oh philanthropy! where is thy grief? OH SHAME, WHERE IS THY BLUSH?”<sup>27</sup> The “pure feelings of humanity,” another paper explained, became paralyzed and justice had gotten “cramped” when there was no protest against something so contrary to the nation’s principles. In denying the essential humanity of the slave, the interstate trade violated the basic principles of justice upon which the nation was founded. Speculation’s extreme nature could lead to corruption in slave owners as they put the profit motive ahead of all others. Individual debasement, the thinking went, would eventually lead to despotism in the political arena. Moreover, if slave traders could induce slaveholders to trample casually on the most basic of human rights, then it was no stretch to imagine that the next threat would be a denial of justice to certain classes of whites.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878*, 2 vol. (Princeton, 1962), 1:53 (quotation); Ralph L. Ketcham, “The Dictates of Conscience: Edward Coles and Slavery,” *Virginia Quarterly Review*, (1960): 46-62; Drew R. McCoy, *The Last of the Fathers: James Madison & the Republican Legacy* (New York, 1989), pp. 310-22.

<sup>27</sup> *Washington Spectator*, 4 Dec. 1830 as reprinted in the *Liberator*, 1 Jan. 1831, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Alexandria Phenix Gazette*, 22 June 1827. For a judgment that the Washington residents thought the slave trade “an evil apparently so inconsistent with

Another significant vein of resentment towards the interstate slave trade centered around the prospect of breaking up families. If southerners allowed the wanton destruction of slave families, then it would be difficult to assume that slavery was a benign institution. The southern white conception of a slave family most often consisted of a woman and her children.<sup>29</sup> Slave owners, moreover, commonly assumed that speculators would break up such families, no matter how loosely defined the term might have been. The Benevolent Society of Alexandria for Ameliorating and Improving the Condition of the People of Color described how slave traders continually tore “asunder the dearest connexions of life.”<sup>30</sup> A Kentucky resident agreed with these sentiments and called for legislation that prohibited men from driving slaves through his state. He contrasted the rightness of slavery with the “sordid” world of selling slaves for profit. Knowing that “this unfortunate class of our population” had been torn from its family was a thought “revolting to humanity, and must sicken every heart.”<sup>31</sup>

Southern opinion was not unanimous on the topic. An advertisement in a Warrenton, Virginia, paper is illustrative of the conflicting attitudes towards the destruction of slave families. An owner who desired to sell three likely female slaves, one of whom had a male child, stated that “No objection will be made to traders purchasing.” Even though the person was willing to deal with a speculator, the specific

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the principles applied to every thing else in America,” see Hall, *Travels in North America*, 2: 141.

<sup>29</sup> Kulikoff, *Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism*, p. 246.

<sup>30</sup> *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 19 May 1827, p. 322.

<sup>31</sup> *Western Luminary*, 3 Nov. 1831.

invitation for traders indicates that there was a significant portion of the population that would not. The seller directed all inquiries to the paper's office, possibly because he felt shame at selling to a trader. It could also be that the person did not want to reveal a financial embarrassment or needed to get rid of an unruly slave. Whatever the motives for secrecy, opinion on the issue of dealing with speculators was fractured enough to require the specific inclusion of traders.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, in Alexandria, William Chapman conducted an auction of twenty slaves on the steps of Joseph Shumate's tavern. He carefully noted that there would be "no objection to traders purchasing at this sale." Auctions were a frequent venue for traders since they could buy slaves at a relatively low cost and often purchase individual bondservants. The specific invitation to traders again revealed a divided mind regarding speculation.<sup>33</sup>

Other advertisements, of course, put no conditions on sales and allowed anyone to buy. One anonymous owner indicated he would sell his twenty year old female slave "with or without her infant male child."<sup>34</sup> Masters with particularly disobedient slaves wanted to make sure they would be rid of them forever. One addressed his advertisement to "NEGRO BUYERS" and offered a likely fellow for sale, "Provided he is carried out of the State." Another who wanted to sell some slaves cryptically noted that "For causes which will be explained, the purchaser shall be at liberty to take them

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<sup>32</sup> Warrenton (Virginia) *Palladium of Liberty*, 4 Feb. 1820.

<sup>33</sup> Washington *Daily National Intelligencer*, 1 Apr. 1816. Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 113-18 believes that relatively few slave traders purchased their slaves at auctions. On the other hand, Russell, "Sale Day in Antebellum South Carolina," makes a compelling case for the pervasiveness of traders at auctions.

<sup>34</sup> *Baltimore American*, 4 Apr. 1820.

out of the state.”<sup>35</sup> Many simply offered up their slaves for sale, but usually directed interested parties to inquire of the printer.<sup>36</sup> Sellers who used printers as intermediaries desired a measure of discretion, since they could hide their identity from the prying eyes of their neighbors. While such advertisements were numerous, those slaveholders who wanted to sell to a trader did not have to advertise their intentions. Speculators were conspicuous when they were in town and usually stayed at the same tavern or inn, so locating them was no difficulty. The primary benefit of advertising a slave for sale was convenience, as the newspaper editor could screen all inquiries before interested purchasers contacted the seller directly.

While selling to a trader might be the easiest way to “dispose” of some slaves, it was not an option that all considered. As the slave trade grew in strength, it became common amongst owners to place limitations on the sale of their slaves. In the ten years following the War of 1812, virtually every major newspaper in the cities near the Chesapeake Bay contained advertisements for bondservants who could not be transported out of the area. Sellers used such conditions to control who could buy their slaves, often excluding slave traders or planters who might transport the bondservants out of the state. Not coincidentally, the advertisements that placed limitations on sales were more frequent from September to February, the prime slave selling season.

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<sup>35</sup> *Norfolk American Beacon*, 7 July 1819 (first quotation); *Baltimore American*, 12 July 1816 (second quotation).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 Jan. 1817, 13 Jan. 1820, 1 Feb. 1822, 30 Apr. 1825; *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 26 July 1816; *Richmond Enquirer*, 21 Mar. 1820, 19 Jan. 1822, 1 Sept. 1826; *Fredericksburg Virginia Herald*, 19 July 1815, 2 Mar. 1816, 3 Sept. 1817, 21 Apr. 1819, 2 Nov. 1820; *Norfolk American Beacon*, 13 Nov. 1815.

Advertisers knew there would be more speculators in the area during these months and wanted to make sure they would not be bothered with such men. Such exclusions might be specific, such as the Fredericksburg resident who offered a twenty-three year old woman and her three year old boy for sale, specifically noting that “No trader need apply.”<sup>37</sup> Others were more subtle in registering their displeasure with the slave trade. One anonymous owner pointed out that his twenty-three year old house servant was “neither dishonest nor vicious” and must be sold to someone in the state. Requiring the buyer to keep the slaves in the state effectively shut slave traders out of the process.<sup>38</sup>

There was some of this similar sentiment in Kentucky and Tennessee, although not as much since the slave trade from these states was not as well developed. For instance, a Nashville resident offered his “smart and valuable” man for sale, but “not for any fault or failing.” He warned prospective buyers that the slave “will not be sold to those who buy to carry down the river.”<sup>39</sup> The same situation prevailed in Burke County, North Carolina, where there was no stigma attached to a master who sold a slave to his neighbor. Owners who sold bondservants to a buyer from another state

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<sup>37</sup> Fredericksburg *Virginia Herald*, 21 Jan. 1826.

<sup>38</sup> *Baltimore American*, 3 Jan. 1820. For some of the many more examples, see *Annapolis Maryland Gazette*, 3 June 1819, 9 Mar. 1820, 25 Mar. 1824; *Baltimore American*, 2 Jan. 1815, 6 Feb. 1816, 10 Sept. 1817, 21 Feb. 1821, 2 Nov. 1822, 2 June 1823, 18 Mar. 1824, 4 Jan. 1825; *Alexandria Phenix Gazette*, 6 Jan. 1826, 1 Jan. 1827; *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 9 Sept. 1815, 20 May 1816, 8 Sept. 1818, 18 Sept. 1821, 5 Mar. 1822, 10 Nov. 1826, 7 July 1830; *Fredericksburg Virginia Herald*, 2 Sept. 1816, 30 Aug. 1817, 20 Sept. 1825; *Norfolk American Beacon*, 8 Aug. 1816, 27 Jan. 1817, 2 June 1818, 15 Jan. 1819, 10 Mar. 1820.

<sup>39</sup> *Nashville Whig*, 18 Dec. 1819. See also *Kentucky Gazette*, 7 June 1824, 13 Mar. 1827.

were often censored and the most objectionable act was to sell to a trader or agent who intended to carry the slaves to a distant market.<sup>40</sup>

Masters also sold slaves with a term of years to serve, but normally put conditions on such transactions. These term slaves were most common in Maryland and were a type of compromise with the peculiar institution. Owners benefited from having their bondservants work for a number of years but also eased their consciences by freeing their labor force, typically when the slaves reached thirty. Although such masters might have been trying to rid themselves of bondservants who were becoming less remunerative, they also could have sold them to a speculator. That there was less reliance on the slave trade than might be expected indicates other motives were at work. Slaves exerted pressure on the system to get decent terms for their release of self-purchase. The frequency of flight and the presence of rebellion dictated that owners used eventual emancipation as an incentive to motivate some slaves and pacify others. Speculation, in this environment, sometimes worked to undermine slavery.<sup>41</sup>

Many owners made certain they sold their slaves to a state resident by requiring some type of security to that effect. Charles Carroll offered a large number of slaves for sale, but required bonds to ensure the bondservants "shall not be sold or carried out of the state." Such bonds, however, seem only to have been popular in cities with a

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<sup>40</sup> Edward W. Phifer, "Slavery in Microcosm: Burke County, North Carolina," *Journal of Southern History*, 28 (1962): 137-65.

<sup>41</sup> Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, pp. 45-54; Christopher Phillips, "The Roots of Quasi-Freedom: Manumission and Term Slavery in Early National Baltimore," *Southern Studies*, (1993): 39-66.

thriving coastwise trade.<sup>42</sup> Those who required a bond before selling their slaves could at least convince themselves there was a minimum of disruptions to the slaves as a result of the sale. The owners probably reasoned that bondservants who stayed in the same area could at least see their friends and relatives (provided *they* were not sold to a trader). Some owners went so far as to stipulate that their slaves not be sold out of state even to settle their estate. During the settlement of William Smyth's estate, the agent handling the sale was forbidden from selling the slaves to someone who would carry them out of Maryland.<sup>43</sup>

Those owners who protected their slaves' family life often sacrificed the best price for the thought of preserving at least some sense of family unity. Such sentiment also limited an owner's flexibility when arranging a sale. Only the wealthiest of southern citizens could afford to buy more than one slave, so it was difficult to find an individual with a desire for the number and type of slaves in one family. These considerations did not deter R. H. Mosby of Halifax County, North Carolina. He lectured prospective buyers that "I am not disposed to violate the laws of humanity by

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<sup>42</sup> *Baltimore American*, 20 Dec. 1816. For more examples of bonds requiring the purchaser to keep the slave or slaves in the local area, see *Ibid.*, 18 May 1816, 8 Jan. 1820, 1 Apr. 1822; and *Norfolk American Beacon*, 28 July, 20 Oct. 1817, 23 Feb. 1818, 18 Feb. 1819.

<sup>43</sup> *Easton Republican Star*, 24 Apr. 1821. For other examples, see *Baltimore American*, 2 Sept. 1822; and *Norfolk American Beacon*, 11 July 1817. A traveler through Virginia learned that it was common for wills to direct executors not to sell slaves out of the state, although such a statement was probably intended to persuade the hearer that slave owners had little to do with the destruction of slave families (Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America with Remarks on its Institutions* (1839; reprint, Westport, Conn, 1962), p. 280).

selling or separating children from parents.”<sup>44</sup> Charles Goldsborough of Maryland found himself “encumbered” with a “certain description of property” that caused him much vexation. Having too many slaves to support, he wanted to sell a portion of them, but knew that a sale would cause “violence” and necessitate “handcuffs and chains,” presumably if he sold his slaves to a speculator. Furthermore, he complained to his friend in Mississippi, “you can not sell them here to any buyer for his own use for more than half or two thirds of their worth.” Instead of dealing with a trader or even a Maryland resident, Goldsborough wanted to sell his slaves to a cotton planter in Mississippi. The net result, he felt, would be similar to the migration of a poor white family. Goldsborough resigned himself to losing money on the sale because “If I sell at all it must be in whole families.”<sup>45</sup>

Most notices in newspapers assumed that female slaves and their children would remain together. William and Hugh Pannell, who sold a variety of items in Fredericksburg, Virginia, advertised that they would sell a woman and her three children. They informed readers that “She is not to be sold out of the Borough,” and required a bond and security to that end. It is highly unlikely the Pannells would have required a bond for the woman while allowing the children to be sold to someone else who could carry them to the Deep South. The underlying assumption was that they

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<sup>44</sup> Advertisement of R. H. Mosby, as quoted in Rosser H. Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina: An Economic View* (Chapel Hill, 1926), p. 71.

<sup>45</sup> “Governor Charles Goldsborough’s Views on Slavery,” *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 39 (1944): 333.



were to be sold together.<sup>46</sup> Those masters who allowed children to be separated from their mothers usually had to spell out such behavior as being within the realm of possibility. Grafton B. Duvall of Annapolis wanted to sell his slave woman and made it clear that she could be purchased with or without her eight children.<sup>47</sup> There were few such advertisements. Sellers who wanted husbands to be sold with their families had to make such terms explicit. One owner offered a man, his wife, and their two children, noting they “will be sold together, cheap, not to be taken out of state.”<sup>48</sup>

Masters who recognized the integrity of slave families strove to preserve them despite financial pressure to the contrary. Jesse H. Cobb, for example, begged Alexander Webb for “indulgence” in paying off a debt. Writing in April of 1833, he asked for time to raise and house his crop. Then he would “carry some of my blacks to the south and get your money.” He wanted to do so in order to “do them a favor” and “sell them in families to good masters.” Cobb asked for an extension on his loan, lest he be compelled to “sell to Speculators.” The alternative, he feared, would be “parents and children[,] husbands and wives might be placed where they never see each other again in this world.” Cobb clearly linked speculation in slaves to the destruction of families since traders would turn around and sell the slaves to the best of their

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<sup>46</sup> Fredericksburg *Virginia Herald*, 20 Oct. 1817. For other advertisement that do not require a bond but stipulate that the mother stay in the area without mentioning the children, see *Ibid.*, 22 July 1818, 1 Jan. 1819; Norfolk *American Beacon*, 10 Apr. 1820; Lexington *Intelligencer*, 17 May 1823; Annapolis *Maryland Gazette*, 3 June 1819; Georgetown *National Messenger*, 26 May 1819; and Baltimore *American*, 16 Jan. 1816, 17 Sept. 1820.

<sup>47</sup> Annapolis *Maryland Gazette*, 6 May 1824.

<sup>48</sup> Baltimore *American*, 23 Aug. 1817.

advantage rather than preserve family ties. It would have been easier for Cobb to sell his bondservants to a speculator—he would not have had to travel and he would have obtained a higher price—but the thought repelled him.<sup>49</sup> When James Norman Smith fell into debt in 1829 he and his wife wanted to move away from their home in Tennessee and make a fresh start elsewhere. Rather than avoiding his debts, Smith decided to sell his land, slaves, and stock animals. He first sold his land to an old gentleman to whom he owed money, and squared that debt. Then, instead of selling his slaves for high prices to a speculator, Smith let the married slaves “choose their Masters who would Buy them with their Wives.” Such a strategy was inconvenient because it limited Smith’s bargaining position. He sold the balance of his slaves for credit, being careful to keep mothers and children together. Since most traders paid in cash, he most probably sold to his neighbors and acquaintances in the area. Smith lamented that “it Took Nearly all My Property to pay My Debts,” but he must have gained some satisfaction from doing his best to preserve the families of his slaves.<sup>50</sup>

Other masters avoided speculators by arranging for the transfer of slaves to an acquaintance in the Deep South. James Madison, though encumbered by debt during his retirement in his home at Montpelier, refused to sell any of his slaves to a speculator. He first sold a portion of his land, but that did not provide enough income. As a last resort, he arranged for the sale of sixteen bondservants to a “friend and

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<sup>49</sup> Jesse H. Cobb to Alexander Webb, 16 Apr. 1833, Jesse Cobb Letter, North Carolina Division of Archives and History.

<sup>50</sup> Memoir of James Norman Smith, Book Two, p. 167, in Wallace Alexander Jones Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

kinsman” from Louisiana. Even though the transaction “gave him much trouble,” Madison was able to convince himself that he saved his slaves from the worst effects of the sale. Rather than seek the high prices of a trader, Madison stubbornly held out and tried to preserve the family structure of his slaves.<sup>51</sup> Likewise, James Fisher of Lunenburg County, Virginia, decided to sell his bondservants because of his “heavy liabilities.” He instructed Joseph C. Hutchinson to take the slaves to Louisiana and sell them there. Fisher made it clear that he was “unwilling to see his servants separated [sic] and scattered and perhaps sacrificed, they being mostly in families.” Hutchinson left in the fall of 1838 and sold the thirty-two slaves for \$38,000. Before carrying out the scheme, Fisher secured the permission of his creditors, indicating that a concern for the welfare of his slaves was secondary to the smooth functioning of the South’s credit and economic system. Like Madison, Fisher sacrificed some profit in order to keep slave families together as best he could.<sup>52</sup>

Masters in Virginia and Maryland who sold their bondservants to private citizens expected the buyers to honor the slaves’ families. These sellers also presumed that private citizens from the Deep South who bought slaves for their own purposes would do the same. For instance, John M. Felder, a member of the House of Representatives from South Carolina, notified his colleague J. J. Roane that he wanted to buy about fifty slaves, but only in families. Roane thought his friend Austin Brockenbrough might be interested in selling some bondservants. There is nothing,

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<sup>51</sup> McCoy, *Last of the Fathers*, pp. 255-60 (quotations on pp. 256, 258).

<sup>52</sup> Sterling Neblett Papers, Account of Testimony, 12 Sept. 1843, Duke.

Roane told Brockenbrough, “more distressing to him [Felder] than the separation of families.” Roane was obviously trying to play upon the motives of Brockenbrough to shelter his slaves from the harsh effects of selling them individually.<sup>53</sup> Slave owners who dealt with planters from another state might reassure themselves that they had cushioned the bitter effects of a sale on their slaves. In reality, any such sale was bound to separate a slave from some member of his or her family, not to mention friends and familiar surroundings. Bondservants lived their lives in terms of aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and friends. Any sale, no matter how careful buyers tried to be, wrecked the web of the family network.

The men and women who made it explicit that they would not sell their slaves to speculators did so, in most cases, to give some type of protection to the slave family. The trade was closely linked to the separation of families, and those who refused to deal with traders knew that their slaves stood a much greater chance of not being separated if a private individual purchased them. Such sellers understood very well the profit motive of traders, knowing that lone slaves normally commanded a higher price than those sold in units. When owners decided to bypass the speculative trade, non-monetary factors took precedence over economic motivations. There was a definite limit, though, to the tender feelings of the owner, and the master-slave relationship should not be romanticized. The level of a master’s concern to keep his slave families together varied immensely. Furthermore, while owners may have made sacrifices to

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<sup>53</sup> J. J. Roane to Austin Brockenbrough, n.d., Austin Brockenbrough Papers, University of Virginia. See Whitten, “Slave Buying in 1835 Virginia,” pp. 231-44 for an example of a Louisiana slaveholder who bought slaves in “families,” which consisted of a woman and her children.

protect slave families, the very nature of slavery itself dictated an exploitative relationship. Owners were always cognizant of a slave's monetary and productive value. John Woods, for instance, had several motives that influenced the sale of his slave Winston. Wood purchased Winston in North Carolina and brought him to Tennessee, but soon realized that the slave was "desirus to get back to his Parants and friends." After some time, Woods decided to arrange for the Winston's return to his family. The slave had served so faithfully that Woods could not bear to think of being without his trusty servant. It was, however, just such a devoted service that allowed Woods to consider rewarding Winston for all of his efforts. He explained that it was "My Duty" to reunite Winston with his family. Such an action was not to be done without regard to consequence, since Woods twice repeated he wanted a "faire price" for Winston. As with most relations between master and slave, there was a mixture of motives. Woods's attempt to reunite Winston with his family was somewhat self-serving. Although losing a trusty and obedient slave would be inconvenient, he was careful to take nothing less than a fair price for his troubles. If Woods had Winston's interests truly at heart, he would have been willing to accept something less than the market value for the slave to ensure that the man could return to his family. The fact that he would sell the slave and get a good price in the bargain meant that Woods was trying to get the best of both worlds. He could convince himself he was a kind and benevolent owner while simultaneously gaining a suitable compensation for his efforts.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> John Woods to John Haywood, 17 Feb. 1818, Ernest Haywood Collection, University of North Carolina. For similar examples, see New Orleans *Louisiana*

The thought of selling slaves for speculation was repugnant enough to Baltimore residents that the city's papers excluded advertisements headed "cash for negroes." The growing presence of "dens in the suburbs of the city, wherein misery personified is groaning in chains and gagged" became too obnoxious.<sup>55</sup> Although notice of the ban appeared in 1821, the practice of excluding such advertisements started in 1820. That year most of the advertisements for slaves offered a few bondservants for sale, and a small portion requested to purchase slaves. Those notices that asked for more than one or two slaves were careful to note that such slaves were "not for speculation."<sup>56</sup> The newspaper even established the "General Register Office," a service that "bought and sold [slaves] on commission." Owners paid a fee to list their bondservants with the Register Office and then buyers or hirers examined the rosters of slaves. The head of the office facilitated the matching of buyers and sellers. He notified the public that the registry was "the general resort and reference for those who wish to buy and sell." The office advertised that it had the lowest priced slaves in town and emphasized that purchasers can always find satisfaction if they were buying or selling bondservants "for

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*Gazette*, 30 Jan. 1823; Thomas Lenoir to William Lenoir, 13 Apr. 1806, Lenoir Family Papers, University of North Carolina; and John Gordon to "Cott," 17 Apr. 1819, Thomas Hardin Perkins Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

<sup>55</sup> *Niles' Weekly Register*, 21 July 1821, pp. 323-24 (quotations); *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Sept. 1821, pp. 44-45. Further evidence that Baltimore's citizens dislike the trade comes from the example of Harrison and Sterrett, a shipping company. When accused of being involved in the coastwise trade they quickly responded they "never were, and are not now, owners of these or any other vessels" used for the trade and resented being connected "with a traffic, in which we never were, and never will be, concerned." (*Genius of Universal Emancipation*, July 1825, p. 149).

<sup>56</sup> *Baltimore American*, 23 Aug. 1820 (quotation), 29 Oct. 1821, 2 July 1822.

*this State only.*” All advertisements stressed that the slaves were to stay in the area rather than go out of state.<sup>57</sup>

The General Register Office was a compromise within the system of slavery. Those who used its services recognized the need for slave transactions since they probably had “excess” slaves to sell or needed to raise some ready cash. They also wanted strict limitations on the terms of those sales. Sellers accepted the fair market value for their slaves in exchange for assurances that the buyers would not take their purchases out of Maryland. There was to be no speculation on the misfortune of others. The system excluded the largest slave traders from directly using its services since they were known by sight and would have been assumed to carry their purchases out of the state. It is possible they used the office by employing a third party to pose as a local farmer and purchase slaves on their behalf. Establishing the Register Office was one way to soften the harsh effects of speculation since, for those who used its services, it effectively neutralized the prospect of selling to a slave trader. Those people who offered their slaves for sale through the office likely felt they were reducing the harmful effects of such transactions upon their slaves. Traders trumpeted that they would pay “cash for negroes” and it is significant the paper banned such advertisements. This close connection between cash and the slave trade seems to have rankled Baltimore residents the most. The emphasis on money demeaned the institution of slavery and reduced the master-slave relationship to one of crass commercialism. If southerners could limit the amount of speculation and exclude traders, then they could still have

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 7 Apr., 17 May, 19 May, 17 Dec. (quotation, emphasis in original) 1821, 1 Feb. 1822.

faith in slavery's goodness. Use of the General Register Office was an attempt to dissociate slave sales from the slave trade and reassure southerners of their noble aspirations surrounding their transactions. It was a way to put a positive face on a dirty business.

The system of excluding the advertisements of traders started to break down, however, as suspicious ads started appearing in the Baltimore papers by late 1822. One "gentleman from Tennessee" indicated he would pay "the highest prices" in cash for slaves. Another wanted "a few Prime Young Negroes for his individual use" and also promised to give cash and high prices.<sup>58</sup> Such inducements were normally tools of speculators. By 1823 the effort to keep traders from using the newspapers completely collapsed. Austin Woolfolk's advertisements once again became a regular staple of the paper, and other traders soon began using the words "*Cash for Slaves*" at the beginning of their advertisements.<sup>59</sup> Any attempt to limit the types of slave sales was bound to fail because it came between the relationship of master and slave. Not all owners wanted to be confined to certain conditions when selling their slaves, especially if they had bondservants they felt were a burden. There was a limited number of Maryland buyers who would keep slaves in the state, so those who wanted to rid themselves of "excess" bondservants had to sell to a trader. The prospect of selling slaves at a high price to a trader rather than at a lower price to a neighbor was often too tempting for slave owners to resist.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 7 Sept. (first quotation), 9 Sept. 1822 (second quotation).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 11 Mar. (quotation, emphasis in original), 31 July, 11 Aug., 5 Nov. 1823.



Slave owners of the Upper South tried to mitigate the negative consequences of slavery through the General Register Office and the advertisements that excluded slave traders. In circumscribing the alternatives and limiting the possible buyers, these owners soothed their consciences by convincing themselves that they had taken the necessary steps to make the sale more palatable to their bondservants. Much of the southern justification for slavery rested on certain obligations that masters had to their slaves, including food, housing, and clothing. A significant number of slave owners also felt the sting of conscience when separating slave families. The interstate slave trade brought this tacit obligation into public view. Placing conditions on a slave's sale was one way for owners to reassert their good faith in the master-slave relationship. Such steps, however, were paltry and often meaningless to bondservants who faced the prospect of separation from all things dear to them.

At its core, this early opposition to the slave trade rested upon the assumption of the slave's humanity. The slave occupied an ambiguous and often contradictory place in southern society, being both a person and property. Slaves were treated like property when they were bought and sold, moved from place to place, and used as collateral in loans. Southern courts consistently upheld the property nature of the slave. Bondservants, however, were also human and did not always engage in behavior that suited slave owners. Possessors of free wills, they could choose to disobey their masters (and suffer the consequences) or comply with the orders given to them. Most southerners recognized this aspect of slavery, as well. This begrudging recognition of humanity was just the minimum. Masters could also assume that slaves had feelings, had strong family ties, and were subject to the same emotions as other human beings.

Doing so required a certain amount of empathy and imparted a sense of dignity to the slave. Most owners preferred not to think about the consequences of their actions upon their slaves. In the case of sale, masters could defend their decisions by telling themselves that what they did was in the best interest of the slave, or that circumstances beyond their control forced them to act. This notion of paternalism, almost a fanciful dream by the master, was one way to justify the institution of slavery. The slave trade, however, operated in direct opposition to any paternalistic pretensions. It assumed the proprietary nature of the slave and assigned a dollar amount to the master-slave relationship. Masters who had no regard for the consequences of the sale upon their slave denied the slave's essential humanity and degraded their own.

In one sense, this ability to see the humanity of bondservants put masters and slaves on the same level. A Kentucky periodical tried to underscore this point by reprinting several notices of slave auctions. Its hope, the editor explained by quoting another periodical, was to "assist our readers to *realize that human beings* are indeed *bought and sold* in this 'land of liberty.'"<sup>60</sup> The paper wanted to shatter the casual assumption of slaves' savagery and replace it with a deep understanding of the vulnerability of slaves' lives. The paper therefore tellingly contrasted bondage and liberty, putting its argument in terms that most southerners would understand.<sup>61</sup> John Randolph made much the same point, but in his own idiosyncratic style. He mocked

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<sup>60</sup> Undated *Christian Mirror*, as reprinted in *Western Luminary*, 8 Mar. 1826, p. 559. Emphasis in original.

<sup>61</sup> James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York, 1990), pp. 68-70.

how masters tried to ease their consciences, and captured how slaveholders professed one motive but acted from another. In 1820 he placed sarcastic advertisements in two newspapers that lampooned those individuals who thought they were doing their slaves a favor by putting conditions on their sale. He asked “Southern and Western Planters” to buy “One thousand prime Virginia born SLAVES” from a man who was “contracting the scale of his business.” Randolph exaggerated the size of the slaveholding—one thousand was preposterous in 1820 Virginia—while the use of the word “business” was a deliberate attempt to capture the feeling of the master-slave relationship. He knew that the slave’s prime function was to increase the holdings of the master and, as such, the pecuniary motives of slaveholders came first. Randolph’s advertisement indicated that the slaves would be sold together or in families to suit purchasers. “No proposals from any slave trader,” he added, “will be attended to.” Randolph ridiculed those planters who pretended that they could ameliorate the shock of a slave sale for their slaves. He recognized that even though owners might make a distinction between selling to southern planters and selling to speculators, the slaves did not separate the two transactions because both caused pain and hardship.<sup>62</sup>

Several years before he placed the advertisements, Randolph had launched a public attack on the interstate trade in the House of Representatives. The actions of a slave woman bound for Georgia so moved him that he implored his colleagues to curb the trade’s excesses. In March of 1816 a slave trader purchased the woman and her two

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<sup>62</sup> The advertisement is quoted in *Savannah Daily Republican*, 6 May 1820. The paper notes that the advertisement is attributed to Randolph and that it appeared in undated issues of the *Richmond Enquirer* and the *Washington Federal Gazette*. Examination of these two papers did not reveal the notice.

children, intending to forcibly separate them from her husband and her other offspring. The woman refused to go. While being housed in a local tavern as the speculator completed his purchases, the woman tried to kill herself by leaping out of a third story window. She broke her arms and back.<sup>63</sup> After Randolph learned of the incident, he rose to his feet in the House and blasted the “inhuman and illegal traffic in slaves carried on in the District.” He made a tangible connection between the legal sale of slaves, which he thought inhuman, and the kidnapping of free persons, which he thought to be exacerbated by the trade. In so doing, he cast doubt upon the efficacy of the interstate slave trade by closely linking it to an illegal and abhorrent activity. Randolph turned his finger of scorn towards an issue that most other southerners would rather avoid or ignore.

He began by pointing to events that were happening under the very noses of the representatives. Not even on the rivers of Africa, he said, was such a sin committed before God and man. At least the African trade plucked savages from their native wilds, rather than “tearing the civilized, informed negro, habituated to cultivated life, from his master, his friends, his wife, his children, or his parents.” Randolph distinguished between the movement of slaves as a natural consequence of ownership,

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<sup>63</sup> Jesse Torrey to John Randolph, 29 Apr. 1816, Select Committee...on the Illegal Traffic in Slaves. Charles Miner of Pennsylvania, in his speech of 7 Jan. 1829, related the story of how the woman inspired Randolph to act (*Register of Debates*, Twentieth Congress, Second Session, p. 178). The incident happened at George Miller’s tavern on F Street, the most notorious tavern in Washington. For corroboration of Miller’s establishment as a frequent destination for slave traders, see Washington *National Intelligencer*, 28 Sept. 1815, 7 May 1816; Deposition of Francis Scott Key, 22 Apr. 1816, and Sworn Statement of Samuel Booker, 7 Mar. 1816, both in Select Committee...on the Illegal Traffic in Slaves.

and the “systematic slave market.” The former was something in which the government had no authority to interfere, while it was the latter that Randolph found so offensive. That Washington had become a “depot for this nefarious traffic” was regrettable. Interstate traders confined slaves in prison before chaining them together in coffles and driving them like cattle on southern roads. He was mortified when a foreigner of “high rank” told him that even though America calls itself the land of the free, the workings of the slave trade would cause “the despotisms of Europe” to be “horrorstruck and disgusted.”<sup>64</sup>

Randolph sounded almost like an abolitionist when he described “hard-hearted masters” who sold slaves for pecuniary gain. Employing a technique that would eventually become standard fare with anti-slavery advocates, he used an emotional plea that appealed to the finer senses of his listeners and depicted the struggles of a few heroic slaves. Randolph told the story of a slave who had saved enough money to purchase the freedom of his wife and child. When the man died, his master sold the family anyway, contrary to the standards of decent society. This and other stories put a human face on a trade that treated its subjects as commodities. By ignoring abstract arguments and concentrating on concrete examples, Randolph hoped to prod the House into taking some type of action to prevent the worst abuses of slavery within

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<sup>64</sup> *Debates and Proceedings*, Fourteenth Congress, First Session, 1 Mar. 1816, pp. 1115-17 (these and the following quotations are from this speech); *Washington National Intelligencer*, 2 Mar. 1816; *Niles' Weekly Register*, 9 Mar. 1816, p. 30; Wilson, *Freedom at Risk*, pp. 69-70; Russell Kirk, *John Randolph of Roanoke: A Study in American Politics* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 131-39. Randolph's speech is often quoted but seldom analyzed. See also Nehemiah Adams, *South-side view of Slavery; or Three Months at the South in 1854*, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1855), p. 196; Weld and Thome, *Slavery*

Washington. At the end of his appeal, Randolph moved that the Committee of the District of Columbia “devise some speedy means to put a stop” to both the lawful and illegal trading in slaves in the District. If the House declined to act, Randolph characteristically threatened to undertake the business himself, “and ferret out of their holes and corners the villains who carried it on.”

Randolph’s stance was quite a departure from his ravings during the debate over the closure of the international trade. Nine years earlier he fought desperately to increase the tonnage of ships that carried slaves because he was afraid of limiting the authority of masters over their slaves. The man who earned a reputation as the South’s foremost opponent of federal interference with slavery was now asking Congress to do the very thing he earlier had opposed. Randolph hastened to explain that he was not interfering in “the contract between the owner and his slave,” and pointedly explained his previous efforts to preserve that relationship. The growth of the interstate slave trade and the concomitant rise of kidnappers changed Randolph’s mind. In 1816 he was willing to end the slave trade in the District of Columbia, a far more drastic step than increasing the tonnage of ships engaged in the coastwise trade.

Part of his reasoning involves the status of the District itself, being under control of the federal government. The sale of slaves within Washington was subject to Congressional regulation and a 1794 federal statute prevented the exchange of bondservants from Virginia and Maryland within the city limits. Eighteen years later Congress amended this law and allowed Alexandria residents to take slaves into the

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*and the Internal Slave Trade*, p. 206; Tremain, *Slavery in the District of Columbia*, p. 50; and Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South*, pp. 45-46.

District. Residents of Washington still could not enter Alexandria to buy slaves in order to bring them back to the District to sell or reside. The intended effect of the amendment was to prevent the sale of slaves in the District. As a consequence, most of the transactions for the purchase or sale of slaves took place in Alexandria, usually in private jails. However, some traders temporarily housed slaves in Washington's taverns or small hotels on the outskirts of town. The nation's capital became a depot for the exhibition of slaves rather than a market, with the large slave traders of the 1820s operating out of Alexandria or Baltimore. The perception, however, was that the District of Columbia had a thriving slave trade because of the Alexandria trade.<sup>65</sup>

The oversight of commerce within federal territory was, in Randolph's mind, a different matter than regulation of trade between the states. The federal nature of the District set it apart and Randolph did not ask for regulation of the trade outside of Washington. He shrunk from full interference with the trade but wanted to find a moderate solution for a public eyesore. His rhetoric, however, does much to reveal his frame of mind. Randolph referred to a "crying sin before God and man" that separated slave families and drove them through the streets like "beasts." The increased visibility of the interstate slave trade, and its obvious brutality, gave Randolph reason to pause. He had no desire to abolish slavery or impair the rights of masters, but he did see the worst side of slavery and wanted to remove the most odious aspects of the peculiar

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<sup>65</sup> Hall, *Travels in Canada, and the United States*, p. 425; *Mobile Commercial Register*, 12 Sept. 1822; Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, pp. 49-53; Tremain, *Slavery in the District of Columbia*, pp. 31-33; Clephane, "Slavery in the District of Columbia," pp. 224-28, 235; William T. Laprade, "The Domestic Slave Trade in the District of Columbia," *Journal of Negro History* (1926): 19-21, 27-30; Ridgeway, "A Peculiar Business."

institution. The best way to preserve slavery, he felt, was to reform it so that its opponents would have no room for criticism. Randolph was sensitive to the South's reputation, as is obvious from his reference to the foreigner's stinging remark. He also had a regard for the treatment of the slaves themselves, seeing them not as brutes, but as humans who needed the protection of the federal government. Randolph sought to domesticate domestic slavery.<sup>66</sup>

There was scant opposition to Randolph's proposal, even from southern representatives, and northerners remained mute on the issue. Robert Wright of Maryland weakly protested that the laws concerning the trade were sufficient. Referring to the War of 1812, he said that Europeans practiced a worse type slavery when they impressed sailors, so there was no reason to draw attention to the interstate slave trade. He tried and failed to bury the issue by diverting attention to a non-controversial topic. Fellow Maryland representative Charles Goldsborough agreed with Randolph's assessment and noted that he, too, had seen coffles in Washington's streets. Goldsborough did not want to limit the trade, though, and noted that laws would be of no value in arresting the trade because they would not be enforced. When Henry St. George Tucker of Virginia suggested that a select committee would be the best method for addressing the situation, the House readily complied. Shifting the burden to a committee would remove the obnoxious issue from debate. In addition to Randolph,

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<sup>66</sup> Kirk, *John Randolph of Roanoke*, pp. 131-33. This concept is taken from Willie Lee Rose, "The Domestication of Domestic Slavery" in William W. Freehling, ed., *Slavery and Freedom* (New York, 1982), pp. 18-36. My analysis extends the concept that Rose first elucidated.



the committee included one member each from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina.<sup>67</sup>

After spending two months gathering information, the committee turned over its evidence to the House. Not surprisingly, the report concluded that the most egregious abuse associated with the internal slave trade was the “atrocious” kidnapping of free persons. Committee members struck out the word “commerce” in describing the overall trade and substituted “traffic.” Although this may have been an attempt to portray the trade negatively, it is possible that it was meant to circumvent the wording of the Constitution that allowed Congress to regulate interstate commerce. The committee also recommended that state authorities deal with the problem rather than the federal government. These conclusions were not shared with the entire House, since the report was ordered to lie on the table just before Congress adjourned.<sup>68</sup> The House did not want to take on the difficult issue of the interstate slave trade, and most members were content to let the issue die. While there was a vague sentiment against the trade and a slight impulse to reform it, there was not enough of a commitment to actually do anything. Despite its recent growth, the interstate trade was more of a minor irritant than anything else. Even though no direct action was taken, it is significant that the first direct attack on speculation in the Capitol had come not from a northerner, but from a

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<sup>67</sup> *Debates and Proceedings*, Fourteenth Congress, First Session, 1 Mar. 1816, p. 1117. That Northerners were mute is an assumption based on the lack of any statements in the public records of the day. The other committee members were Joseph Hopkinson (PN), Charles Goldsborough (MD), William Mayrant (SC), and John Kerr (VA).

<sup>68</sup> *Papers of the Select Committee...on the Illegal Traffic in Slaves*, (quotations); *Debates and Proceedings*, Fourteenth Congress, First Session, 30 Apr. 1816, p. 1465;

southerner, and one who had a solid reputation as a defender of slavery. Another southerner supported his opinion. Just as importantly, this examination of the slave trade stemmed from the Upper South, while the Lower South remained silent on the issue. Southern members did not defend the trade, justify it, or shift the blame onto the back of the slave trader, as they would do later. Northern members refused to attack the trade as emblematic of the harsh state of slavery in the South or call for an immediate end to slave trading and the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. In 1817, discussions about the slave trade generated no light and no heat. It was not yet a part of the nation's consciousness.

The next denunciation of the interstate slave trade in Congress came three years later, during the debates surrounding the admission of Missouri. This time the discussion was dramatically different. Northerners raised the issue and forced southerners to respond. James Tallmadge triggered the debate when he moved that slavery be prohibited from Missouri and slave children born after statehood be free at age twenty-five. The northern representatives who allied with Tallmadge used their observations of the slave coffles in Washington as a way to seize the moral high ground and bludgeon the South. In the face of this outside attack on slavery and the trade, southerners relied on apologetics to defuse northern accusations. They refused to discuss the moral implications of speculation but concentrated instead on the constitutional right of southern migrants to carry bondservants into new territory. Southerners hoped to keep the slave trade out of the debates because they were not

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*Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 1 May 1816; *Niles' Weekly Register*, 4 May 1816, p. 165.

comfortable with defending it as an integral part of servitude and did not have a coherent explanation for its existence. The focus of the deliberations had changed, as well. There was no mention of kidnapping; instead, debate centered on whether or not the presence of a thriving slave trade in Washington contradicted the principles of free government and if the slave trade should be allowed in territory added to the United States. Northerners depicted the trade as emblematic of slavery and drew the conclusion that such an evil institution must not be allowed to expand. Their experience with the District of Columbia's slave trade became the basis for their remarks about what slavery would be like in Missouri.

Arthur Livermore of New Hampshire fired the first salvo when he used the slave trade to blast the South. In dramatic fashion, he described how the separation of "mothers and children" led to "agonies of grief." Tallmadge then kept up the pressure by refusing to listen to any excuses for the trade. He noted that a "slave driver, a trafficker in human flesh" carrying a whip just drove a coffle past the Capitol. Tallmadge hinted that providence placed the coffle there to provide a dramatic illustration for his argument. He described how the "males, who might raise the arm of vengeance, and retaliate for their wrongs, were handcuffed, and chained to each other, while the females and children were marched in their rear, under the guidance of the driver's whip!" Tallmadge could not believe such scenes took place in "Republican America."<sup>69</sup> Livermore and Tallmadge's vivid descriptions were a powerful indictment

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<sup>69</sup> Livermore's remarks are in *Debates and Proceedings*, Fifteenth Congress, Second Session, 16 Feb. 1819, 1: 1191-92, while Tallmadge's are on 1: 1210. See also Glover Moore, *The Missouri Controversy 1819-1821* (Lexington, 1953), pp. 33-51.

of slavery's dark side. They referred to scenes with which most of their fellow representatives were familiar and directly connected slavery's vitality to a robust slave trade. In doing so, they tried to mobilize opposition to the spread of slavery by arguing that the admission of Missouri as a slave state would strengthen the slave trade. The two men hoped to tap into the emotions of their colleagues by describing slavery in the most dismal way possible.<sup>70</sup>

If northern representatives intended to use these condemnations of the trade to aggravate their southern colleagues, they failed. The indictment of speculation and slavery drew no heated response from the southern delegates. Only Louis McLane of Delaware directly addressed the issue. In opposing Tallmadge's amendment, McLane argued in favor of the dispersal of slaves into land west of the Mississippi River because those who moved would be less restless. He also tried to convince his colleagues that such bondservants would live better lives because they would be on superior land. McLane apologetically noted that, on a personal level, he would not permit slaves to be sold by traders, or become the objects of profit. He believed the states, not the federal government, should regulate the movement of bondservants and pointed to the example of Delaware. His home state prohibited the introduction or exportation of slaves for sale. McLane's bland appeal failed to rouse his colleagues to action. No other southern congressman referred to the interstate slave trade during the Missouri debates. The virtual silence of southerners on the slave trade suggests that they would not be drawn

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<sup>70</sup> Huston, "Experiential Basis," 609-40 describes northern revulsion at seeing slave auctions and coffles, albeit for a later time period. He convincingly argues that northerners who had first-hand experience with slavery were likely to be shocked by what they saw and actively oppose the institution.

into a discussion of slavery's morality, nor would they criticize any portion of it.

Southerners could hardly defend slavery through an admission of the interstate slave trade's brutality and the fact that it would spread to new territory. Their willingness to criticize speculation evaporated in the face of northern assaults on slavery.<sup>71</sup>

Northern representatives changed tactics once it became apparent their criticism would not draw out southerners. They alleged that the spread of slavery into Missouri would further increase the smuggling of Africans into the United States. On this account, they tried to tar the legal interstate trade with the brush of the illegal African trade. John W. Taylor argued that an expansion of slave territory would make the whole country west of the Mississippi River a "market overt for human flesh." The natural consequence of allowing slaves into Missouri, his argument ran, would be an increase in smuggling. On the shores of Africa there would be a rise of unscrupulous men who bought slaves with "a few gewgaws or a bottle of whiskey" and then sold them in New Orleans. Like the earlier attack on slave coffles, the denunciation of the international trade drew a muted response from southerners, who merely asserted that the foreign trade was illegal and they did not wish to revive it.<sup>72</sup>

Although using the interstate slave trade as a moral indictment of slavery and dredging up the African slave trade did not cause southerners to rise to the bait, another

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<sup>71</sup> *Debates and Proceedings*, Fifteenth Congress, Second Session, 17 Feb. 1819, 2: 1233-34; Don Fehrenbacher, *The South and the Three Sectional Crises* (Baton Rouge, 1980), pp. 9-23. Even South Carolina Senator William Smith, who defended the institution without reservation, did not mention the trade.

<sup>72</sup> *Debates and Proceedings*, Fifteenth Congress, Second Session, 15 Feb. 1819, 1: 1175.

tactic did draw a heated response. When northern senators linked the interstate trade with the migration of bondservants across state lines, southerners responded quickly. This creative method relied on the ninth section of the Constitution's first article to argue that Congress could prevent the importation and migration of slaves into new territories or states. Timothy Fuller of Massachusetts was the first to try this approach. Again, he injected a moral indictment into his argument by saying he feared that the "opening of an extensive slave market will tempt the cupidity of those who would otherwise perhaps might gradually emancipate their slaves." The establishment of "a new and boundless market" for slaves, moreover, would doom the nascent colonization movement. Philip P. Barbour of Virginia brushed past the allegations of a vast slave market and defended the right of southerners to carry their slaves into Missouri. Prohibiting such movement would effectively prevent slaveholders from moving into the new state. He pointed out that slave labor was necessary to establish farms, and since few slaves would be available for purchase, there would be no incentive for migration. Barbour tried to avoid the topic of the slave trade, merely noting that "nothing scarcely but the necessity of the master, or the crime of the slave" induced masters to sell their slaves. The Fifteenth Congress adjourned having accomplished nothing, except to show that southerners were reluctant to face the moral criticisms of slavery and eager to steer the debate to a strict interpretation of the Constitution that defended property rights.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 15 February 1819, 1: 1183-84, 1188; Fehrenbacher, *The South and the Three Sectional Crises*, pp. 22-23.

The Missouri debates continued into the next session, but when discussing the movement of slaves, the congressmen continued to talk past one another. Northern representatives continually mentioned the movement of slaves by traders, while their southern counterparts constantly spoke of migration. In the Senate, Jonathan Roberts of Pennsylvania referred to a Louisiana law that outlawed the carrying of slaves into that state unless done so by a United States citizen who intended to settle there. John Elliot of Georgia responded by noting that slaves were not subject to restrictions of migration because they had no volition or self-determination. They might be carried, but they did not migrate. The Constitution, he explained, did not allow Congress to inhibit transfer or removal of slaves from one state to another. Such a right was “claimed and exercised by the States, and they will never surrender it.” He went on to admit that slavery was an “evil,” but sound policy dictated migration because the slave population was safer when it was dispersed instead of being cooped up in a few slave states.<sup>74</sup> Senators from Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia, and Kentucky all concurred that Congress could lawfully outlaw the importation of slaves from areas outside the United States but cannot “regulate the internal distribution” of slaves.<sup>75</sup>

Southern representatives produced an argument similar to their counterparts in the Senate. A jittery Alexander Smyth of Virginia explained what would be the consequences of confining slaves to Virginia. “Let Saint Domingo answer,” he said,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Sixteenth Congress, First Session, 17 January 1820, 2: 125-26 and 129-35.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., speeches of Walter Leake, 19 Jan. 1820, 2: 197-99; William Smith, 26 Jan. 1820, 2: 259-64 (quotation on 2: 260); James Barbour, 1 Feb. 1820, 2: 317-20; and Richard M. Johnson, 1 Feb. 1820, 2: 351-52.

since the more that slaves were concentrated, “the greater the danger.” He thought dispersion was the best policy for a “distinct people” whose growth might endanger the peace. Not only would dispersal lead to safety for all, but Smyth believed it improved the treatment of slaves. Reid of Georgia asserted that slaves were held to an easy form of bondage, thus justifying the institution.<sup>76</sup>

It is clear that southern congressmen would not acknowledge the presence of an interstate trade that destroyed slave families and caused untold hardship. Their way of dealing with the situation was to deflect all references to the inhumanity or barbarity of speculation and instead assert that Congress had no power to regulate the migration of bondservants. They assumed that most of the slaves who moved into new territory came with migrating owners rather than slave traders. The use of the word “migration” to describe the slaves was intentional, as it did not paint as harsh a picture of the slaves’ conditions and bypassed constitutional questions. Southerners were beginning to realize that the slave trade was vital to slavery’s continued existence. They were not, however, willing to admit publicly that slave owners participated in the trade. There was no consensus on how to respond to northern attacks on speculation. Southerners were struggling with how to reconcile their defense of slavery with their misgivings surrounding speculation, especially in the face of outside pressure to end the trade.

In the end, of course, Missouri retained slavery, and the interstate slave trade remained unregulated. Northern congressmen used the trade as a convenient tool to attack the South. Vivid rhetoric describing the markets of human flesh and the cries of

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Sixteenth Congress, First Session, 18 Jan. 1820, 1: 1010-12 (quotation), 1 Feb. 1820, 1: 1024-27.



slaves separated from their families became a weapon against slavery's expansion.

Those who opposed the peculiar institution tried to cut through some of the abstractions and make the discussion personal. They hoped to sidestep the theoretical issues of law and policy by stirring up the emotions of their listeners. Although the Missouri debates may have identified "the doctrine of states' rights with the defense of slavery," the contours of debate reveal that the interstate slave trade was included in the defense perimeter. The inchoate nature of the trade, specifically the fact that it was just developing into a major source of labor for the Deep South, meant that southerners did not rush to defend it. They began to recognize the growing importance of the slave trade to the maintenance of slavery, if not through the presence of coffles in the South, then through the persistent attacks of northern representatives.<sup>77</sup>

Those who defended the trade did so in cold and legalistic terms. They managed to avoid interference with the trade, but there was something hollow about their victory, especially in light of the heated and emotional arguments of slavery's opponents. Although southerners hid the interstate slave trade under the guise of state sovereignty and migration, such defenders needed another strategy to protect slavery because the moral attacks left them vulnerable. They needed to draw a sharper distinction between migration and the slave trade because the former was widely regarded as legitimate while the latter was suspect because selfish motives could be imputed to it. The slave trade, furthermore, seemed to contradict one of the main reasons for accepting slavery—that the institution improved bondservants' lives.

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<sup>77</sup> Norman K. Risjord, *The Old Republicans: Southern Conservatism in the Age of Jefferson* (New York, 1965), p. 220.

Southerners needed to find a consistent and effective way to ward off criticism of a slice of their society that was an easy point of attack for outsiders and that caused misgivings for many insiders as well. Distinguishing between the slave trade and planter migration was a start, but would prove inadequate to withstand the sustained abolitionist attacks of the next decade.<sup>78</sup>

Southerners did not rush to defend the interstate trade in the literary realm, either. George Tucker, for instance, struggled with how to reconcile the trade with his support of slavery. Born in Bermuda, Tucker grew up in Virginia near his distant cousin, Henry St. George Tucker. He failed as a lawyer, but his skill in selecting rich young women to marry ensured that he would have enough money to support his vices of gambling and lavish parties. Tucker served in the state legislature before his election to the United States Congress, where he betrayed his Jeffersonian Republican principles by supporting the Bank of the United States and Henry Clay. His legal career seemed to be a dalliance more than anything since he aspired to be a writer.<sup>79</sup> In *Letters from Virginia* (1816), Tucker used the well-worn literary device of a fictitious outside observer to satirize society, in this case Virginia's. In his fifth letter, he provided a sentimental description of a coffle of slaves and their cruel trader. Tucker invited the reader's attention by musing whether he was in Norfolk or on "some barbarous coast,"

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<sup>78</sup> For consistent attacks on the interstate slave trade and strident southern countermeasures in the 1830s and beyond, see David L. Lightner, "The Door to the Slave Bastille: The Abolitionist Assault upon the Interstate Slave Trade, 1833-1839," *Civil War History*, 34 (1988): 235-52; and David L. Lightner, "The Interstate Slave Trade in Antislavery Politics," *Civil War History*, 36 (1990): 119-36.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Colin McLean, *George Tucker: Moral Philosopher and Man of Letters* (Chapel Hill, 1961), pp. 3-36.

implicitly linking the interstate trade to its African forebear. Tucker's French traveler heard and then saw thirty slaves who were chained to one another. The sight of the coffle appalled him and he felt pity for the slaves who clung to one another for emotional and physical support. He was especially touched by a woman and her three children, one of whom suckled while the other two held either side of their mother's apron to prevent being separated from her. Tucker described several "varieties of distress," from a "soft gentle sorrow" to a "grim and threatening despair, that asked for nothing but a grave."<sup>80</sup> A speculator had just bought the slaves at an auction.

Tucker's detailed description makes it clear that he had seen a slave coffle. His moving portrayal of the scene was intended to provoke emotions of sympathy for the slaves. He noted that they sang a hymn, showing their nobility in the face of calamity. Tucker not only described the slaves in the coffle, he imbued them with vivid emotions. Posing as the Frenchmen, he wondered how someone could hear without compassion "the shrieks of a mother, torn forever from the bosom of her children" or not have a pang of conscience when the "little child of innocence" was torn from its mother. He described slaves as human beings so that whites would regard them as such, rather than insensitively dismissing them as brutes. Any person who thought that slaves were not human was sadly blinded from seeing that bondservants "love their wives, their children, their homes, as well as their masters." Tucker cited the fact that the "sentence of banishment strikes them like the message of death" as proof of their humanity.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> [George Tucker], *Letters from Virginia, translated from the French* (Baltimore, 1816), pp. 29-30.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

If the slaves had a certain amount of dignity and humanity in Tucker's account, the same cannot be said for the slave trader. The "rough looking white man" sat "carelessly lolling in his sulkey." A short distance from the courthouse, he stopped at a tavern, "supplied himself with brandy, and his horse with water, (the poor negroes, of course, wanting nothing,) stepped into his chair again, cracked his whip, and drove on, while the miserable exiles followed in funeral procession behind him." The visitor labeled the trader as rude brute and wanted to call down fire from above "to blast the wretch," even though such thoughts were unchristian. Somewhat confused, the visitor asked a local resident what the slaves did to deserve such a punishment. The man replied that the slaves had done nothing at all but their master wanted money and "these drivers give good prices." Tucker implicitly showed how the commercial nature of the slave trade warred against the paternalistic pretenses of slave owners. The writer wondered how Virginians could "tolerate an abuse of this horrible character" since such a "dreadful punishment" was inflicted on an "innocent being." Tucker was certain that "Virginians are not barbarians" even though their actions may tell a different story. Habit made such men forget the situation of the "poor wretches" and even reconciled them to such horrors.<sup>82</sup>

Tucker clearly condemned the slave trader. Like the later southern novels that perpetuated the myth of the slave speculator, his portrait of this man was one-dimensional.<sup>83</sup> There was no room for admiration of the speculator's character; he was

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-35.

<sup>83</sup> Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 180-84.

motivated by money, was lazy, drank too much, and had no redeeming qualities. What set Tucker's work apart from later novels was his portrayal of witnesses to the coffle and the slaves themselves. Tucker was most critical of the auction's observers, something that was in stark contrast to all of the later antebellum fiction. He singled out the witnesses for rebuke because they allowed such reprehensible activities to flourish in their midst. No civilized nation should tolerate such treatment of any part of its population. Those who sold slaves were not merely caught in a web of forces beyond their control, but were willing participants in the destruction of slave families. Like the trader, they were motivated by profit because they received good prices for their slaves from speculators. Tucker equated the slaveholder who sold his slaves with the speculator who bought them. Both shared the blame for the slave trade and both had allowed slavery to become repugnant.

The heroes of the description were the slaves. Tucker's slaves were different from whites, but any inferiority was from their situation rather than their color. The later accounts of slave sales painted bondservants in stereotypical terms, portraying them as wholly devoted to their owners and accepting the reasons for the auction. Tucker refused to stereotype the slaves in his story. They did not show excessive devotion to their masters and, just as importantly, they were not miraculously rescued in the end; they marched southward singing their hymn. The overall lesson that Tucker wanted to teach was that slavery exploited the slaves and caused the white mind to "sink."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Letters from Virginia*., pp. 73-101, quotation on p. 101.

Tucker's second work, published eight years later, was less critical of Virginia society. He was more forgiving of those who sold their slaves and depicted a state struggling through difficult economic times. The poor condition of Virginia agriculture forced owners to part with their slaves even as they worked to keep their labor force intact. In *The Valley of the Shenandoah* (1824), Trueheart, an attorney, handled the disposition of Mrs. Grayson's property. Her husband's death forced Mrs. Grayson to sell her slaves in order to prevent foreclosure. Trueheart conformed to his client's wishes and located a buyer in Georgia who was expanding his cotton holdings. Finding such a man relieved Mrs. Grayson, since the pain of separation from her servants would be softened since all of them, or at least nearly all, would go to a "good master" and the structure of their families would be preserved.<sup>85</sup>

Naturally the slaves learned of the sale since the domestic servants overheard the conversation between Trueheart and Mrs. Grayson. One of the oldest slaves approached her owner and asked for a favor. She requested that her daughter and grandchildren not be included in the pending sale because they would be worked too hard in Georgia.<sup>86</sup> Mrs. Grayson reasoned with the slave and convinced her that slave life in Georgia will not be as bad as imagined. The old slave relented to the sale, but asked that her youngest grandchild be sold to a Virginia farmer. Mrs. Grayson agreed and called all of the slaves together to officially inform them of the impending sale.

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<sup>85</sup> [George Tucker], *The Valley of the Shenandoah; or, Memories of the Graysons*, 2 vol. (New York, 1824), 2:194-96.

<sup>86</sup> The mention of sale to Georgia is in stark contrast to all later fiction, which assumes slaves will go to Louisiana.

She assured her bondservants that none of them would be sold “against their wishes.”

Three or four slaves indicated their desire to stay in Virginia, so Mrs. Grayson spared them from the auction. In a final act of “genuine benvolence,” she gave her old clothes to her slaves and fed them sugar and molasses.<sup>87</sup>

The slave auction commenced that afternoon, and many people were “extremely shocked” to see fellow human beings “set up for sale to the highest bidder, like horses or cattle.” Even those who were accustomed to such things found it disagreeable. Tucker defended the scene, though, in asserting that slaves hardly felt their fetters and that all of their wants were supplied. Only “moderate” coercion was necessary to persuade them to take part in the auction and they did not “feel it to be wrong” since they were members of “a sort of patriarchal family.” When one of the slaves cried on the auction block because she would be separated from her husband, the man’s owner bid on her. He risked financial ruin by trying to keep the “hussey” and her husband together. Trueheart came up with a better idea: sell both of the slaves to the Georgia bidder. It was done and all parties were satisfied. The true crisis of the day came when two slave traders bid for a likely mulatto girl who suited the tastes of the “libertines of the French or Spanish settlements.” Under orders from Trueheart, the auctioneer slowed down the bidding while the attorney authorized a bystander to buy the woman on his behalf. When one of the speculators made a disparaging remark about Trueheart’s motives, the local farmers rebuked the man and forced him to leave the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 2:196-201, 212.

auction. The end result was that no spouses were separated, no slaves were sold to Georgia against their wishes, and the plans of the slave trader were thwarted.<sup>88</sup>

Tucker's second work was a curious blend of conflicting attitudes. He was not as critical of slavery as in his first novel, but did condemn the institution, or at least its effects. The slave trader, the crowd, and the slaves were depicted in simplistic ways. The bondservants, for instance, professed undying devotion to their mistress and instead crying, wailing, and grimly submitting to the speculator as before, they were almost happy to go to Georgia. Tucker, though, could not just explain away the auction and its blunt intrusion into slaves' lives. He was critical of absentee ownership and the separation of families. Tucker was one of the few southern novelists to address these issues without apology. He struggled to explain something so shocking as an auction, but ended up deadening its impact. While Tucker was commenting on the horror of the auction for the slave, he tried to reconcile that situation with the paternalistic view of slaveholders. Slavery was still a "necessary evil," but his second novel softened the harsh edges of the peculiar institution and acquitted those masters who took care of their slaves. The greatest evil of slavery, he concluded by 1824, was the dissolution of slave families from an auction. This result could be, and often was, prevented by the quick thinking and resourcefulness of the upstanding citizens of the South. He came to accept the slave trade's presence by denying its pervasiveness.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 2: 206-10. Tucker was unusual in that he regarded a slave family as including the husband.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 1: 62 (quotation); McLean, *George Tucker*, pp. 183-86; Susan J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representations of Women, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature* (Amherst, Mass., 1995), pp. 48-61.



Tucker's changing attitudes came, in part, because of success in increasing his slaveholdings. As he prospered, he saw the difficulties of his neighbors and became afraid that Virginia would be swamped with idle slaves. For that reason, he defended slavery's expansion during the Missouri Compromise. Since the spread of slavery to the Southwest would lessen the chance of unrest in Virginia, he did not want to confine bondservants in the "older" states where they would eventually outnumber whites and threaten society. Tucker believed in diffusion and looked to the day when slaves would decline in value and become a burden to their owners, who would then lead the drive for emancipation. He later supported colonization and proposed that the United States buy land west of the Rocky Mountains "that may be suitable for colonizing the free people of color." Tucker held moderate attitudes on slavery, wanting it protected but wishing somehow to reform or gradually abolished it. His divided mind appeared in his second novel. He could hardly defend the willful fracturing of slave families that he described in *Letters*, so he modified his portrayal of the slave trade. It was now something that enlightened slaveholders needed to resist. The underlying motive, however, was a justification of slave sales and an attempt to show how little the trade disrupted the lives of slaves. The evolution of Tucker's views is indicative of how most southerners were learning to deal with the slave trade.<sup>90</sup>

Like Tucker, John P. Kennedy struggled to find a context for the slave trade in his writings. Kennedy's novel *Swallow Barn* first published in 1832, reflected this

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<sup>90</sup> *Register of Debates in Congress*, Eighteenth Congress, Second Session, 2 Mar. 1825, 1: 736 (quotation); McLean, *George Tucker*, pp. 180-86; *Debates and Proceedings*, Sixteenth Congress, First Session, 25 Feb. 1820, pp. 1531-35.

ambivalent view of slavery and the separation of slave families. He devoted a chapter to slave life and observed that the slaves were blessed with a “kind and considerate master” who frequently looked in on them to make sure they were comfortable. The slaves always happily greeted their master who gave them gifts. There was an “air of contentment and good humor and kind family attachment” between owner and slave. Kennedy’s treatment of the slaves was flattened and robbed them of their humanity since they were perfectly content with their lives.<sup>91</sup> Even though the slaveholders were “men of kind and humane tempers,” there was the necessity of reform. Kennedy thought masters were liable to reproach “for the neglect or omission of our laws to recognize and regulate marriages, and the relation of family amongst the negroes.” He was ashamed that he had no answer for charges that families were separated and called for stiff punishment to prevent the separation of husband and wife or parent and child. The “disregard of these attachments has brought more odium upon the conditions of servitude than all the rest of its imputed hardships.” Foreclosing the separation families would gratify conscientious slaveholders and silence critics of slavery.<sup>92</sup>

Kennedy was obviously a harsh critic of family break-ups and was candid enough to admit that they were prevalent, or at least widespread enough to bring infamy on the South. He did not blame the slave trader and, in fact, he failed to mention the

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<sup>91</sup> John P. Kennedy, *Swallow Barn, or a Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (1832; reprint, New York, 1854), pp. 451-52; Charles H. Bohner, *John Pendleton Kennedy: Gentleman from Baltimore* (Baltimore, 1961), pp. 86-87, 187-88. Tucker and Kennedy were the only two southern novelists prior to 1840 who addressed the issue of the interstate slave trade. This paucity is in stark contrast to the glut in the 1850s, especially following the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* p, 459.

practice of speculation or depict an auction. Kennedy did not rely on the scapegoat of the slave trader who was responsible causing anguish and grief among untold slaves but who was thwarted by the actions of the virtuous citizenry. He, instead, called for a reform of the slave owners who should be punished for separating families. Rather than allowing the sale and speculation to continue unbridled by blaming others for its existence, Kennedy would legally limit the power of slaveholders over their possessions. He sought an answer in the law rather than in the crafting of a mythology. Kennedy recognized the agitation over slavery and blamed the separation of families for most of the problems. Like John Randolph, he wanted southerners to reform slavery in order to silence outside critics.<sup>93</sup>

Tucker, Kennedy, and other critics of the slave trade sensed that continual exposure to coffles would dull the senses of white southerners. The *African Observer*, a short-lived anti-slavery journal, thought “this traffic may be readily reconciled” once “the nerves and the conscience have become inured to the purchase and sale of human beings as goods and chattels.”<sup>94</sup> Another southerner, this one a resident of North Carolina, told Andrews he could tolerate everything about slavery but the “shocking separations” when slaves left family and loved ones behind. When told that such scenes were inseparable from slavery itself, the man reluctantly concluded that if the slave

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<sup>93</sup> Although Kennedy admitted slavery was “theoretically and morally wrong,” any sudden freedom of the slaves would bring calamity. He felt the question of emancipation must be left to the southerners who would deal with it in a reasonable fashion (Ibid., pp. 455-58).

<sup>94</sup> *African Observer*, May 1827, p. 54.

trade could not be made better, "it must be submitted to with all its inconveniences."<sup>95</sup>

An Alexandria newspaper agreed. It condemned the trade, those who participated in it, and the others who sat idly by because soon people would "become so accustomed to its repulsive features, that they cease to discourage it in others."<sup>96</sup>

Citizens in the Upper South were divided as to the trade's virtue, alarmed at its growth, and uncertain of its proper place in society. The increased number of coffles and the growing presence of speculators at estate sales and public auctions clashed with southerners' idealistic assumptions about slavery. While the exploitation of slaves on a plantation could be a private affair, coffles and auctions were constant reminders of how slaves could suddenly be uprooted and separated from all they knew. Upper South residents could no longer blithely assume that the yoke of bondage was easy or that a slave's burden was light. The obvious growth of speculative activity raised concerns that the master-slave relationship was being tilted too much towards exploitation. Concerns over the trade's expansion, however, were not translated into specific activities devoted to controlling speculation. There were halting efforts, like the General Register Office, but they proved inadequate to the task at hand. Citizens of the Upper South were more likely to ignore the issue or deflect discussion elsewhere. John Randolph made no progress in his attempt to regulate the District of Columbia's trade and the Missouri debates reveal a willingness to debate migration rather than

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<sup>95</sup> Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, pp. 195-96.

<sup>96</sup> Alexandria *Phenix Gazette*, 22 June 1827. For more examples, see James S. Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*, 2 vol. (London, 1842), 1:182; "American Convention," p. 328; and Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States of North America*, 2 vol. (New York, 1849), 2: 125-26.

speculation. Even though Upper South residents were divided when it came to the interstate slave trade, they were slowly moving towards more cohesiveness. They were, in fact, beginning to adopt attitudes that were prevalent in the Lower South.

## Chapter Four

When John Belton O'Neale looked out his front door in 1816 he was mortified to see a speculator and his slave coffle "on John O'Neill's Lane, on the Columbia road" in central South Carolina. The gang, which marched "sadly along," consisted of "all sizes, ages, sexes, and conditions." The children, shielded by the innocence of youth, were "playful as other [i.e. white] children" despite being "nearly or quite naked."<sup>1</sup> O'Neale, a Quaker, was so moved by the slaves' plight that when elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives, he sponsored a bill that prohibited the entry of all slaves into the state.<sup>2</sup> He tried to convince his fellow representatives that the slave trade was not only "unfeeling[,] tyrannical and oppressive," but also dangerous. O'Neale feared that speculators flooded the state with "a population that could not be controlled nor governed." He used "impassion'd eloquence" to describe "all the horrors of the San Domingo revolution," implying that South Carolina might be next to suffer a race war. Upon completing his speech, O'Neale glanced at his colleagues and noted with satisfaction that there was not "an unmoistened eye in the assembly room."<sup>3</sup>

O'Neale was not the only person in South Carolina to have misgivings about the slave trade. The same year he lamented the presence of the trade, a grand jury in

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<sup>1</sup> "Memoir of John O'Neill," pp. 61-62, John O'Neale Papers, Duke. He also spelled his name "O'Neill."

<sup>2</sup> South Carolina House of Representatives Journal, 25 Nov. 1816 through 19 Dec. 1816, pp. 2, 142, 207, Manuscript in South Carolina Archives, Columbia, South Carolina.

<sup>3</sup> "Memoir of John O'Neill," pp. 63-64, John O'Neale Papers.

Spartanburg thought it a “serious and lamentable grievance” that “slaves from other parts of the Union” were brought into the state. In York, another grand jury came to a similar conclusion and asked for a law “against the introduction of slaves into this state.”<sup>4</sup> Governor David Williams, perhaps sensing the general mood of the state, expressed his concern about the situation. In his address that opened the 1816 legislative session, he asked the legislators to stop the “remorseless merciless traffic...which is a reproach to our morals, and an outrage to our feelings.” Not only did slave trading create countless “suffering victims,” it brought in “convicts and malefactors.” The recent war had allowed slaves to run loose in the state and something must be done to remedy the situation. Williams felt that “wise policy” and the “lights of humanity” intersected in this case. Not only was outlawing the slave trade prudent, it was the right thing to do.<sup>5</sup> Seven years earlier, Williams had joined Peter Early and John Randolph in the House of Representatives to fight for protection of the coastwise transportation of slaves. Apparently Williams’s commitment to protect the interstate movement of slaves had its limits. While it might seem noble to debate the right to transport slaves, the reality of bondservants entering the state persuaded Williams to adopt a different stance.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Spartanburg grand jury, as quoted in H. M. Henry, *The Police Control of the Slave in South Carolina* (Emory, Vir., 1914), p. 106 (first quotation); Charleston *Southern Patriot and Commercial Advertiser*, 7 Dec. 1816 (second quotation).

<sup>5</sup> Charleston *Courier*, 4 Dec. 1816 (quotation); Henry, *Police Control*, p. 106.

<sup>6</sup> Williams’s opposition to lowering the tonnage for coastwise vessels transporting slaves is described on pp. 19-22 of this study.

Williams signed O'Neale's law in December of 1816. Citizens and emigrants to South Carolina could not bring slaves into the state, although migrants passing through could have bondservants. The measure mandated the seizure of all slaves imported in violation of the act, their auction, and the transferal of half the proceeds to the informer. Those importing the slaves were fined \$50, while those who knowingly bought an imported slave incurred a \$400 penalty.<sup>7</sup> O'Neale noted with delight that the law was "unpopular with the Slave drivers and brokers."<sup>8</sup> His exultation was short-lived, however, since the measure was too harsh. As written it could not be, and was not, enforced. The demand for slaves in South Carolina was too great and numerous residents violated the law. Others flooded their representatives with petitions. By the time the legislature convened, seven hundred and thirty-five petitions were awaiting action. One local paper complained, "God only knows how many more will be presented before the end of the session."<sup>9</sup> Legislators were loathe to abandon the law altogether, so they struck a compromise and allowed South Carolina residents to bring in slaves whom they acquired by inheritance, bequest, or marriage.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Charleston *Southern Patriot*, 21 Feb. 1817; *Niles' Weekly Register*, 15 Feb. 1817, p. 399; Henry, *Police Control*, pp. 106-7. The statute is reprinted in David J. McCord, ed., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina* (Columbia, S. C., 1840), 7: 451-54.

<sup>8</sup> "Memoir of John O'Neale," p. 61, John O'Neale Papers.

<sup>9</sup> Charleston *City Gazette*, 4 Dec. 1817, as quoted in Henry, *Police Control*, p. 107 (quotation); *Port Folio*, July 1818, p. 70. For an example of the petitions, see Kulikoff, *Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism*, p. 226.

<sup>10</sup> McCord, ed., *Statutes at Large*, pp. 455-56.



Andrew Pickens, the new governor, had no confidence in the amended statute. He pointed out how the law, which was “repugnant to the interests of many of our fellow citizens, is violated with impunity.” Pickens also felt it would have no effect even if supported by citizens. No one would stoop so low as to “incur the odium attached to the character of an informer.”<sup>11</sup> After “one of the most eloquent and animated debates that has taken place on the floor for many years,” the legislature agreed with Pickens and repealed the law in 1818.<sup>12</sup> O’Neale was no longer in the House of Representatives to fight for his bill. He complained bitterly that another Quaker, Walter Herbert, sought political gain by leading the opposition to the law. Herbert, “having the wealthy slave owner” on his side, “was elected to the displacement of J. B. O’Neale.” In doing so, O’Neale felt Herbert was betraying his faith by “placing himself foremost in the ranks of those who were increasing the miseries of the bondsman.”<sup>13</sup>

Most residents of the Lower South recognized that the importation of slaves was necessary to support the expansion of the plantation system. More white migrants and

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<sup>11</sup> *Charleston Courier*, 30 Nov. 1818; *Niles’ Weekly Register*, supplement to vol. xvi (1819), p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> *Charleston Courier*, 12 Dec. 1818 (quotation); *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 2 Jan. 1819, p. 352; McCord, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 7: 456-58; South Carolina House of Representatives Journal, 23 Nov. 1818 through 18 Dec. 1816, p. 198, South Carolina Archives. The vote in the Senate was close, 22-19, while the House vote was not, 73-30. For the reaction of a Savannah resident to entire affair, see William Gaston to W. Karthaus and Company, 9 Jan. 1819, William Gaston Papers, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>13</sup> “Memoir of John O’Neale,” pp. 64-65, John O’Neale Papers. O’Neale later became chief justice of the state (A. E. Keir-Nash, “Negro Rights, Unionism and

the increase of available land fueled the desire for slave labor. Those who desired to improve their rank in society knew the surest way to advance was through acquiring land and slaves. While land might be cheap and plentiful, slaves would be inexpensive and available only if someone brought them to the labor-starved areas of settlement. Ensuring the penetration of the slave trade into developing areas would drive down the price of labor and increase the profitability of farming operations for those who invested in slaves.

Even though southerners believed a large number of slaves were necessary for expansion, every state that imported a significant number of bondservants tried to stop the interstate slave trade. Residents of these states were not uniformly enamored with the slave trade or with speculators. They had different reasons, however, to view this commerce with suspicion. Instead of wringing their hands over how the trade emphasized the commercial aspect of slavery, citizens of the Lower South were concerned with how the large increase of bondservants would impact their society. There was much ambivalence about the slave trade and about the actions of traders themselves. A variety of fears—concern about the growing and restive slave population, the assumption that speculators trafficked in the worst sort of slaves, and the drain of currency and capital to slave exporting regions—intermingled and motivated southern legislatures to enact laws outlawing the slave trade. South Carolina, like the other importing states, passed its law only when a numbers of fears combined to impel legislative action. Because there were so many motives, it becomes difficult to sort out

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Greatness on the South Carolina Court of Appeals: The Extraordinary Chief Justice John Belton O'Neill," *South Carolina Law Review*, 21 (1968): 141-90).

precisely why states denied themselves something upon which they were so dependent.<sup>14</sup>

The impulse to prevent the entry of speculators and their slaves moved like a wave over the importing states. Once residents perceived the large numbers of slaves entering their state, they sounded the alarm and tried to staunch the flow. As we have seen, South Carolina tried to keep out slaves in 1816. At the same time, Georgia passed a similar measure. These two states lay at the end of the “upper route” and witnessed an alarming growth of slave importations after 1815.<sup>15</sup> State residents and bona fide immigrants could bring slaves into Georgia. The legislature, however, specifically prohibited “the introduction of slaves into this state by negro traders for speculation.”<sup>16</sup> In 1817 the legislature amended the law<sup>17</sup> before abolishing it in 1824.<sup>18</sup> Five years later the state again prohibited speculators from bringing slaves into the state.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> There are brief discussions of the state legislation outlawing the internal slave trade in Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, pp. 202-3; Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South*, pp. 271-75; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1956), p. 253; and Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 83-87.

<sup>15</sup> That at least some Georgia citizens were cognizant of the South Carolina legislation is seen in the 1 Jan. 1817 issue of the Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, which compares the two laws. Many South Carolina residents, as well, kept an eye on the Georgia legislation (*Charleston Southern Patriot*, 15 Feb. 1817).

<sup>16</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 1 Jan. 1817 (quotation); *Savannah Republican* 11 Jan. 1817; *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia* (Milledgeville, 1816), pp. 8-9; Scarborough, *Opposition to Slavery*, p. 113; Flanders, *Plantation Slavery in Georgia*, p. 184. Flanders mistakenly describes a 1798 law designed to close the foreign slave trade as intended for the interstate slave trade.

<sup>17</sup> Undated *Augusta Herald*, as reprinted in *Charleston Courier*, 15 Dec. 1817; *Niles' Weekly Register*, 19 July 1817, p. 323; Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 16 Dec., 23 Dec. 1817; Scarborough, *Opposition to Slavery in Georgia*, pp. 113-15.

At about the same time, Kentucky and Tennessee moved to close their doors to slave traders. Tennessee acted first, prohibiting the importation of slaves “for the purpose of selling or disposing them, or any of them, as articles of merchandize.” The 1812 law, which ran for five years, allowed citizens to bring in slaves for their own use and mandated emigrants swear before a justice of the peace they were not violating the laws.<sup>20</sup> The state then passed another law in 1826 reinstating the prohibitory statute.<sup>21</sup> Persons entering Kentucky had to swear they “brought no slave or slaves to this state, with the intention of selling them.”<sup>22</sup> Despite the fact that the law was not repealed, advocates of colonization introduced laws to prevent slave traders from operating in the state. Those who favored the law hoped that cutting off the activities of slave traders

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<sup>18</sup> *Acts of the Regular Assembly of the State of Georgia* (Milledgeville, 1825), p. 124; *Milledgeville Georgia Journal*, 21 Dec. 1824. The legislature was unsuccessful in striking down the law in 1821 (*Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia* (Milledgeville, 1821), p. 144; *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Dec. 1821). Scarborough, *Opposition to Slavery*, pp. 117-18 discusses all the legislation.

<sup>19</sup> *Milledgeville Southern Recorder*, 26 Dec. 1829, 16 Jan. 1830; *Milledgeville Georgia Journal*, 26 Dec. 1829. The bulk of this legislation controlled the activities of free blacks, particularly sailors. It also became illegal to teach slaves to read or write, and slaves or free persons of color who introduced rebellious literature into the state were punished severely.

<sup>20</sup> *Acts passed the Second Session of the Ninth General Assembly of the State of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1812), pp. 109-10 (quotation on p. 109); *Nashville Whig*, 30 Sept. 1812; Caleb Perry Patterson, *The Negro in Tennessee, 1790-1865* (1922; reprint, New York, 1968), pp. 43-44.

<sup>21</sup> *Acts passed at the Extra Session of the Sixteenth General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, 1826* (Knoxville, 1826), pp. 31-33; *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, 13 Dec. 1826.

<sup>22</sup> Harrison, *Antislavery Movement in Kentucky*, p. 46.

would eventually rid the state of slavery. Bills failed to make it out of the legislature in 1828 and 1830.<sup>23</sup>

As the bulk of the slave trade shifted to the emerging Southwest, those states responded with prohibitive legislation. The emergence of New Orleans as a major importer of slaves led to much concern in Louisiana. In 1826 Representative Thomas Overton of Rapides Parish introduced a bill to prohibit the entry of slaves into the state for sale. The law, intended to eviscerate the interstate trade, prohibited anyone from bringing in slaves after June 1, 1826 “with the intent to sell or hire the same.”<sup>24</sup> Those convicted of the Louisiana law could be sentenced up to two years in prison and fined \$1,000. The state seized the slaves, sold them, and paid one-quarter of the profits to the informer, thus putting it in the business of slave trading.<sup>25</sup> Like the other states, Louisiana’s law did not last long. Two years after its passage the legislature repealed it.<sup>26</sup> One year after the passage of Louisiana’s prohibition law, Alabama passed a

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<sup>23</sup> *Western Luminary*, 17 Dec. 1828, p. 197; *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 6 Feb. 1830, p. 399; Undated Frankfort *Kentuckian*, as quoted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 27 Dec. 1828, p. 87; *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, Feb. 1830, p. 380; Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, pp. 145-46.

<sup>24</sup> *Baton Rouge State Gazette*, 31 Mar. 1826 (quotation); *House Journal*, Seventh Legislature, Second Session (Baton Rouge, 1827), pp. 61, 63, 66, 76-77. Although the record of the House vote is lost, the Senate voted 9 to 5 in favor of the bill. Those opposing the bill were Cabeen (Oachita), Flaueac (Opelousas), Goff (St. Tammany, Washington, St. Helena), Smith (Feliciana), and Thomas (East Baton Rouge). Residents or immigrants who brought in slaves could not sell them for two years (*Senate Journal*, Seventh Legislature, Second Session (Baton Rouge, 1826), pp. 77-78, 87).

<sup>25</sup> *Baton Rouge State Gazette*, 31 Mar. 1826.

<sup>26</sup> *Senate Journal*, Eighth Legislature, Second Session, 1828, pp. 14, 19-20, 23, 26; *House Journal*, Eighth Legislature, Second Session, 1828, pp. 12, 17, 31. As part of

similar provision. Taking advantage of a clause in the state's constitution that enabled them to outlaw the importation of slaves, Alabama legislators barred slave traders from bringing bondservants into the state.<sup>27</sup> Like the Louisiana act, Alabama residents could bring in slaves for their own use, provided they waited two years before selling them.<sup>28</sup> Again, like Louisiana, Alabama legislators repealed the act after two years.<sup>29</sup>

The growth of Natchez as a slave trading center may have prompted the framers of Mississippi's first constitution to incorporate a provision empowering the legislature to prevent slave traders from doing business in Mississippi.<sup>30</sup> Governors David Holmes and Gerard C. Brandon urged legislators to enact measures that would keep speculators

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this legislation, slave traders could not bring in a child under ten years of age unless there was adequate certification that the child was an orphan (*Baton Rouge Gazette*, 7 Jan. 1829; Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 1994), p. 165; Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana*, p. 40).

<sup>27</sup> The constitutional provision, adopted in 1818, was intended to prevent the international trade (See provisional Governor William Bibb's concerns about the "importation of slaves from any foreign country" in *Natchez Mississippi State Gazette*, 25 Jan. 1818).

<sup>28</sup> *Woodville Republican*, 12 May 1827; *Niles' Weekly Register*, 7 Apr. 1827, p. 100; *Western Luminary*, 9 May 1827, p. 355; Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828* (1922, reprint; Tuscaloosa, 1990), p. 167; Sellers, *Slavery in Alabama*, p. 174.

<sup>29</sup> *Journal of the House of Representatives of Alabama*, Tenth Session (Tuscaloosa, 1828), pp. 29, 36, 47, 73; *Journal of the Senate of Alabama*, Tenth Session (Tuscaloosa, 1828), p. 23.

<sup>30</sup> Winbourne Magruder Drake, "The Framing of Mississippi's first Constitution," *Journal of Mississippi History*, 29 (1967): 321-22; Alfred H. Stone, "The Early Slave Laws of Mississippi," *Publication of the Mississippi Historical Society for 1899*, p. 135; Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, p. 162.

out of the state.<sup>31</sup> The legislature tried, and failed, to outlaw the slave trade in 1827 when a bill passed the Senate but lost in a tie vote in the House.<sup>32</sup> Alone among the states that imported a large number of slaves, Mississippi tried to regulate the slave trade instead of barring it. In 1808, the territorial legislature required that all slaves over fifteen years of age brought in by professional speculators have two certificates of character. This law was most likely intended for the international trade, coming as it did during the debates on the international slave trade.<sup>33</sup> In 1819 the state legislature passed a law requiring a tax of \$20 for each slave brought in for sale or as merchandise. Slaves convicted of murder, burglary, arson, rape, or grand larceny could not cross the border, and state residents were exempt from the tax unless they brought the slaves from Louisiana or Alabama. Free blacks and mulattos were barred from emigrating to the state.<sup>34</sup> Six years later the legislature imposed a two-and-a-half percent tax on any "auctioneer, or transient merchant, or vendor of merchandize or slaves." Like the

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<sup>31</sup> See the statements of Governor David Holmes in *Natchez Mississippi State Gazette*, 1 Mar. 1818; *Natchez Mississippi Republican*, 4 Jan. 1820; and the declaration of Governor Gerard C. Brandon in *Woodville Republican*, 18 Jan. 1828. The content of these statements will be discussed later.

<sup>32</sup> *Senate Journal*, Tenth Session, p. 109; *House Journal*, Tenth Session, pp. 243-44; J. F. H. Claiborne to John T. McMurren, 9 Feb. 1828, J. F. H. Claiborne Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History; Winbourne Magruder Drake, III, "Constitutional Development in Mississippi, 1817-1865," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1954, p. 163.

<sup>33</sup> Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, p. 162.

<sup>34</sup> *Acts passed at the first Session of the second General Assembly of the State of Mississippi* (Natchez, 1819), pp. 4-7; *Niles' Weekly Register*, 24 Apr. 1819, p. 160; *Milledgeville Georgia Journal*, 11 May 1819. The reason for the exemption concerning slave purchased in Louisiana and Alabama is that they would have, in most cases, been purchased from slave traders.

earlier tax on slaves, the law was also an attempt to discourage transient traders from selling slaves in Mississippi but was also a means of combating the state's deficit.<sup>35</sup>

Even while all of the importing states save Mississippi restricted the interstate slave trade between 1815 and 1830, they ultimately abandoned their ineffectual efforts. It took a cataclysmic event, in this case the Nat Turner rebellion, to galvanize the Lower South into taking action once again. The activities of Nat Turner and his collaborators confirmed the worst fears of whites throughout the South. One slaveholder confided that he could no longer look at his favorite slaves "with any degree of complacency." Where he saw loyalty before, now he only detected an attitude of "trickery, murder & bloodshed." A "sycophantic smile" veiled thoughts of "I only wait for an opportunity to embrace my hands in yours & your innocent childrens blood."<sup>36</sup> Such thoughts of terror set off an "almost frenzied legislative activity" throughout the South. States of the Deep South passed another round of laws designed to repress the activity of free blacks, control the activities of slaves, prevent the introduction of more bondservants, and thwart slave traders.<sup>37</sup>

Louisiana responded first. Governor A. B. Roman, recalling the previous ban on speculators, argued that recent events in Virginia formed an "irresistible" justification for new legislation. The planters of Louisiana reaped fewer benefits from the trade than

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<sup>35</sup> *Laws of the State of Mississippi, Eighth Session* (Jackson, 1825), p. 123 (quotation); *Woodville Republican*, 11 Jan. 1825. The tax was later lowered to one percent (Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, pp. 162-63).

<sup>36</sup> Robert P. Walker to George Blow, 24 Sept. 1831, Blow Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

<sup>37</sup> Herbert Aptheker, *Nat Turner's Slave Rebellion* (New York, 1966), p. 74.



they expected, especially given the low quality of slaves they purchased. Roman described how the “cupidity of the negro traders has often rendered them little scrupulous in regard to the characters of their slaves they have imported into this state.” He feared a conspiracy amongst importers to buy slaves in the Virginia jails “where insubordination lately displayed itself.”<sup>38</sup> A Virginia planter only added to the scare when he informed a commercial house in New Orleans that a number of slaves involved in the uprising were pardoned and ordered to be transported out of the state. He expected that “most of them will be landed on the banks of the Mississippi” in less than a month.<sup>39</sup> A Richmond paper concurred, noting that the slaves in the Southampton area “*are thinning by sales for distant markets.*”<sup>40</sup>

Not all Louisiana residents succumbed to the hysteria. A planter from Iberville Parish thought any legislation would be “grossly illusory” and favored only by the “most credulous.” This planter, who came from a parish that needed a large number of slaves to sustain its sugar production, could not believe that Louisiana was in such low repute that its neighbors considered it the “Botany-Bay, the Australasia for the discarded villainy of the other states.” The recent uprising in Virginia notwithstanding, he felt the legislature should consider the current bill in a calm and deliberate manner.

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<sup>38</sup> New Orleans *Courier*, 1 Oct. 1831.

<sup>39</sup> New Orleans *Advertiser*, 14 Oct. 1831. A similar scenario was described in the New Orleans *Argus* (See undated New Orleans *Argus*, as quoted in Charles Elliott, *History of the Great Secession from the Methodist Episcopal Church in the Year 1845* (Cincinnati, 1855), p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Undated Richmond *Compiler*, as quoted in undated Lexington *Kentucky Reporter*, as quoted in *Western Luminary*, 6 Nov. 1831. Emphasis in original.

The planter recited a litany of reasons why Louisiana should not exclude slaves. There was no replacement for them. The state had enough trouble with “disasters incidental to climate.” The “depressed prices” for its agricultural products would only get worse. With the exception of a few great slaveholders, the rest of the state needed slaves to convert unproductive land to fertile acreage. Common “diseases” like “eating dirt” conspired to ensure a “great mortality” among the slaves and kept their prices high. Prohibiting the entry of slaves would deter migrants to the state, thus depressing land prices. Finally, any such law would be unconstitutional.<sup>41</sup> Writing from New Orleans, Isaac Franklin anticipated some type of prohibitory legislation. He frankly declared, “I am much at a loss how to act should no law be passed.” Franklin welcomed the push for legislative action, since “if there was no probability of a restriction on the introduction of slaves they [i.e., their prices] would be very low and dull.” Should such a bill fail, slave prices would again plummet.<sup>42</sup>

Serendipitously, Governor Roman had already called a special legislative session for the purpose electing a new senator. Roman kept up the pressure for a new law when the session opened. He disputed the “vague rumors” that insubordinate slaves had crossed Louisiana’s borders, but reminded the legislature of its duty to adopt prudent measures to keep undesirable slaves out of the state. Roman told legislators that a “large number” of slaves from Virginia had been tried for involvement in the

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<sup>41</sup> New Orleans *Louisiana Advertiser*, 21 Oct. 1831.

<sup>42</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 26 Oct. 1831, Ballard Papers. Although he did not want to, Franklin had the option to switch to the Mississippi market. He did, however, enjoy the artificial demand for slaves created by the legislature’s deliberations (James R. Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 30 Oct., 14 Nov. 1831, *Ibid.*).

revolt and were condemned for deportation. Executing the sentence would “carry into neighboring states the contagion of their crimes.” Louisiana had the right to refuse such “wretches” in order to preserve its public tranquility.<sup>43</sup> Even though the slave traders in Louisiana waited with their “mouths open to catch any thing that may fall from the dam<sup>d</sup> legislature,” it was obvious some type of prohibitive legislation would pass.<sup>44</sup> The legislature easily enacted a law that prohibited the interstate slave trade. Immigrants could bring in slaves for their own use, but neither they nor Louisiana residents could purchase slaves in Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, or the Arkansas Territory. This provision, although easily evaded, was an effort to make up for the lack of legislation in the neighboring states.<sup>45</sup> One speculator thought that he and his colleagues were being unfairly singled out. He wrote that the “Planters & Citizens are very savage against the traders.” Louisiana’s law lasted only until the beginning of 1834, when the legislature repealed all of the provisions barring the entry of slaves into the state.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Senate Journal*, Extra Tenth Session, 1831, pp. 1-2 (quotations); *New Orleans Courier*, 16 Nov. 1831; *New Orleans Louisiana Advertiser*, 15 Nov. 1831.

<sup>44</sup> James R. Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 14 Nov. 1831, Ballard Papers.

<sup>45</sup> *Senate Journal*, Extra Tenth Session, 1831, p. 8; *New Orleans Courier*, 19 Nov. 1831; *New Orleans Bee*, 19 Nov. 1831; *New Orleans Louisiana Advertiser*, 19 Nov. 1831; Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Louisiana*, p. 42; Schafer, “Immediate Impact,” pp. 367-68; Stephenson, *Isaac Franklin*, p. 75.

<sup>46</sup> James R. Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 14 Dec. 1831, Ballard Papers (quotation); *House Journal*, Twelfth Legislature, Second Session, pp. 6, 9; *Woodville Republican*, 11 Jan. 1834; Stephenson, *Isaac Franklin*, p. 76. In his letter, Franklin incorrectly predicted that the Louisiana legislature would tighten its laws and “pass an entire prohibition in July (against Planters Emigrants &c...).”

Louisiana was not the only state to respond to the Turner rebellion. Other southern states revealed their fears when they also passed prohibitory legislation. Georgia, a state that imported few slaves by this time, passed a non-importation law anyway.<sup>47</sup> In neighboring Alabama, Governor John Gayle felt the states of the Deep South should put up a united front against Virginia. He noted how speculators buy slaves of “bad character” at low prices and then sell them in Alabama and elsewhere, meaning that the contagion of rebellion might spread. Scenes similar to the Nat Turner rebellion might be repeated in Alabama. If the states of the Deep South passed laws to end the importation of slaves as merchandise, then perhaps they could check the “mischief” inherent in allowing the entry of “slaves of every description” and achieve a triumph for the “cause of humanity.”<sup>48</sup> The discovery of a slave who had been kicked out of North Carolina for “distributing seditious publications” only served to increase fears in the state.<sup>49</sup> Caught up in the frenzy, the legislature quickly passed a bill that was intended to put slave traders out of business. The law was part of a larger effort to control the slave and free black populations. While it prohibited the entry of slaves

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<sup>47</sup> Scarborough, *Opposition to Slavery*, pp. 119-20.

<sup>48</sup> *Alabama Senate Journal*, Thirteenth Session (Tuscaloosa, 1832), pp. 56-57 (quotations); *Mobile Commercial Register*, 14 Dec. 1831.

<sup>49</sup> The slave, Jacob Cowan, was arrested for circulating the “infamous Walker Pamphlet.” The North Carolina authorities wanted him “sold into the interior of some of the Southern States, where he would be deprived of the opportunity afforded by a seaport town to receive & distribute such books.” Cowan ended up in Mobile, hardly insulating him from the ocean (James F. McKee to the Police of Mobile, 3 Nov. 1831 (quotations); David Crawford to Gov. John Gayle, Jr., 18 Nov. 1831, Governor’s Papers (1831-35) Gayle, Container SG 5628, Folder 1, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

except those by citizens and emigrants for their own use, it also had numerous provisions regarding “free persons of color.”<sup>50</sup> The next session, when passions cooled, the legislature repealed the clauses pertaining to the importation of slaves, making it legal for speculators to bring in slaves once again, but did not touch the provisions regarding free blacks.<sup>51</sup>

Mississippi, true to form, responded differently than the other importing states. The *Natchez Gazette* warned that Virginia was “swarming with Negro traders” in the wake of the rebellion. As a result, slaves who were “directly or indirectly engaged in the work of murder” would soon arrive in Mississippi.<sup>52</sup> Instead of enacting legislation like its neighbors, the state changed its constitution. The 1832 document prohibited the introduction of slaves “as merchandize or for sale” after May 1, 1833.<sup>53</sup> A bill to enact

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<sup>50</sup> *Alabama Senate Journal*, Thirteenth Session, p. 103, 134-35; *Mobile Commercial Register*, 25 Jan. 1832; *Huntsville Southern Advocate*, 28 Jan. 1832; Sellers, *Slavery in Alabama*, p. 175. Those who brought in slaves could not sell them within three years. The provision regarding the assemblage in groups of five was exempted for worship services. It also fined owners \$500 for not feeding or clothing their slaves. Free persons of color could not enter the state, while those already in Alabama could not learn how to read or write, could not gather in groups of greater than five without permission, and could not talk to a gathering of slaves without permission.

<sup>51</sup> *Journal of the Senate of Alabama*, Fourteenth Session (Tuscaloosa, 1832), pp. 6, 25, 37; *Huntsville Southern Advocate*, 16 Mar. 1833; *Mobile Commercial Register*, 17 Nov., 24 Nov. 1832

<sup>52</sup> *Natchez Gazette*, 5 Oct. 1831, as quoted in Stamp, *Peculiar Institution*, p. 254.

<sup>53</sup> *The Constitution of the State of Mississippi* (Jackson, 1932), p. 25; Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, p. 163; Winbourne Magruder Drake, “The Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1832,” *Journal of Southern History*, (1957): 366; Andrew Fede, “Legal Protection for Slave Buyers in the U.S. South: A Caveat Concerning Caveat Emptor,” *American Journal of Legal History*, (1987): 351-52.

enforcement legislation failed to pass in the ensuing legislative session, leaving Mississippi in the anomalous position of prohibiting the slave trade but having no means of enforcing the constitution.<sup>54</sup> The *Natchez Courier* viewed the situation as a compromise and speculated why the legislature did not take more aggressive action. It noted the Louisiana law was too severe, thus it was “either evaded or openly violated with impunity.” The paper also appealed to class interests. Even if Mississippi could draft effective legislation, the rich will still import slaves by sending their agents to Virginia or Maryland. The poor, who wanted only one or two slaves, could not afford such an expense and “must either submit to the extortions of the wealthy, or rest content with what they have.”<sup>55</sup> Mississippi’s citizens voted to repeal the slave trading amendment in 1833, but county officials did not follow proper form in tallying the votes and thus the constitution remained intact. The legislature refused to amend the constitution and a bill for another referendum failed.<sup>56</sup> Even as it ignored the will of the people, the Mississippi legislature increased the bond for transient merchants and imposed a two and one-half percent tax on sales by slave traders.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the state prohibited slave trading in the constitution but taxed it by legislation.

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<sup>54</sup> *Senate Journal*, Sixteenth Session, p. 57; *House Journal*, Sixteenth Session, p. 375; *Natchez Courier*, 25 Jan. 1833.

<sup>55</sup> *Natchez Courier*, 23 Aug. 1833.

<sup>56</sup> Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, p. 163-64; Drake, “Constitutional Development,” pp. 180-81.

<sup>57</sup> *Laws*, Seventeenth Session, p. 49; Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, p. 164.

As the example of Mississippi shows, states sporadically enacted and tepidly enforced the legislation regarding the importation of slaves. Most observers agree that such laws “carried few terrors for the trader.”<sup>58</sup> Even though speculators may not have been terrified, not all of them automatically evaded the laws. At least one resident of Georgia noticed a change after the legislature banned slave traders. He noted the “heart is seldom pained by those disgraceful exhibitions [i.e. slave coffles] which were before so common among us.”<sup>59</sup> In a later letter, the writer observed how approximately the same number of slaves entered the state, except fewer did so at the behest of a speculator. If an honest citizen wanted a slave, he only had “to lose a few days to meet his agent at the Savannah river, or any other part of our frontier, and introduce his slave, himself, agreeably to law.”<sup>60</sup> It was “very certain” that speculators had disappeared from “some” of the counties. More importantly, “the *character* of those [slaves] introduced is better...Purchasers for their own use *will* be circumspect, while it is known that speculators *frequently* purchase slaves of the worst characters, because they can get them cheap.”<sup>61</sup> What the writer failed to note was that Georgia citizens who traveled to the South Carolina border bought slaves from speculators, so it is hard to imagine how the “character” of the slaves could be better. Whether consummating the

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<sup>58</sup> Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 87-93 (quotation on p. 87); Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South*, pp. 273-75; Stamp, *Peculiar Institution*, p. 256.

<sup>59</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 13 Oct. 1818. See *Ibid.*, 4 Dec. 1821 for a similar opinion.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 Oct. 1818.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 Nov. 1818. Emphasis in original.

sale in South Carolina or in Georgia, slave traders still were instrumental in the transaction. Perhaps the writer was hopeful that itinerant traders were doing less business while traders with known reputations were responsible for more sales.

Even if it is unclear whether the prohibitory legislation in Georgia was effectual, some of the largest slave traders complied, at least initially, with the bans in Louisiana. They could easily divert their operations to Natchez, a market that was just as profitable as New Orleans. Following Louisiana's initial importation ban, Austin Woolfolk concentrated his efforts on selling slaves in Natchez. He notified his Louisiana customers that he had fifty "Virginia born" slaves for sale and that "Planters would do well to call and supply themselves, as the Legislature has passed a law prohibiting them [slaves] from being brought into the State after the 1st June."<sup>62</sup> As advertised, Woolfolk began diverting his slave shipments to Natchez. Whoever filled out the Customs Manifests for Woolfolk crossed out the words "for the purpose of being sold or disposed of as Slaves, or to be held to Service or Labor" and wrote "to be held to Service or Labor" and "to be shipped aboard a steamboat for Natchez in the State of Mississippi." Seven of Woolfolk's shipments in 1826 and 1827 were diverted in this manner.<sup>63</sup> Woolfolk also notified Louisiana residents he had a "large number of likely young Virginia born Negroes" for sale at Purnely Tavern in Natchez.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> New Orleans *Louisiana Advertiser*, 21 Mar. 1826.

<sup>63</sup> Slave shipments with arrival dates of 5 Dec. 1826, 6 Feb., 11 May, 31 May, 22 Nov., 7 Dec. 1827, New Orleans Inward Slave Manifests.

<sup>64</sup> New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, 13 Jan. 1827.



Likewise, Louisiana's 1831 ban and the Turner scare influenced the behavior of Franklin, the greatest speculator of the day. He worked quickly to liquidate his operation before the ban took effect, selling two hundred and seventy slaves in a month. After he sold out, Franklin executed no bills of sale in New Orleans until the law's repeal. He informed a fellow trader that he "had to leave N. O. for this place [Natchez] for the purpose of selling the negroes that came out by the last shipment." He moaned that switching all of his operations to Natchez was "hard work for a One Eyed man."<sup>65</sup> Franklin was not the only speculator to shift his base of operations. A visitor to New Orleans saw the boats "crowded with slaves" glide past the city and continue up the Mississippi to Natchez. That market, he learned, "has consequently become inundated, by having poured into it, in addition to its usual stock, the Louisianian supply." Up to three hundred slaves awaited sale in the Natchez market in the months following the Louisiana ban. There were so many slaves diverted there that prices dropped noticeably. Paul Pascal, who normally traded in New Orleans, wrote a colleague that even if he did not know of a law that could adequately prevent the slave trade, he grudgingly admitted that times had changed. The law and Nat Turner's rebellion had inhibited demand. He told his supplier in Norfolk that, despite the decreased supply, "Niggers do not bring any price at this moment and the Speculators have as many as 200-300, which they do not put on the market on account of the very low price."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 9 Jan. 1832, Ballard Papers (quotations); Stephenson, *Isaac Franklin*, p. 76.

<sup>66</sup> Ingraham, *South-West by a Yankee*, 1: 106-7 (first quotation); James R. Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 18 Jan., 29 Oct. 1832, Ballard Papers; Paul Pascal to

Some southern citizens assumed the laws would affect the slave trade.

Residents of Baldwin County, Georgia, drafted a notice that gave “*Fair Notice to Negro Speculators*” that the law prohibiting their activities would be enforced. The notice added that “the citizens of this and other states will be dealt with alike.” One Putnam County, Georgia, resident called on the legislature to seek an adequate remedy, something he acknowledged was a task of “some delicacy and difficulty.” It was difficult to frame a law that respected the constitutional rights of emigrants while still being effective. One part of the answer, the writer felt, was empowering officers to “*search out and prosecute*” offenders.<sup>67</sup> Other Putnam County residents were unconcerned with the niceties of the law. Should the authorities fail to enforce the law, they promised to uphold the measure, which was “sanctioned by every principle of justice, humanity, policy, and interest.”<sup>68</sup> The Alabama importation ban created a scarcity and increased slave prices in the Tuscaloosa area. Ninety-nine field hands, for example, sold at twice their assessed value.<sup>69</sup> Nathaniel Harrison tried to talk his son William out of settling in Alabama. He pointed out that the legislation prohibiting the entry of slaves would raise the prices of slaves in that state. Harrison offered to buy slaves in his home state of Virginia and send them to his son. That way “you might

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Bernard Raux, 24 Dec. 1831 (translation from the French), Pascal Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (second quotation).

<sup>67</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 28 Aug. 1816, (first quotation, emphasis in original); 6 Nov. 1816 (second quotation, emphasis in original).

<sup>68</sup> Norfolk *American Beacon*, 2 Jan. 1818; New Orleans *Louisiana Gazette*, 25 Feb. 1818. The quotation is found in both papers.

<sup>69</sup> *Liberator*, 18 Feb. 1832, p. 26.

exchange them for land in the Mississippi state, or sell them in the state of Missi. for cash & thus increase the capitol in money.”<sup>70</sup> Other traders took the laws seriously. A colleague of speculator Isaac Jarratt counseled him to be cautious when it came to legislation. Once Alabama passed its importation law, Jarratt’s friend opined that “you would do better in the western District than any place I know of, if you continue the traffic.”<sup>71</sup>

Citizens in the states that exported slaves knew quite well that trading bans affected the price of slaves. In the Chesapeake, the area from which the bulk of the slaves came, the Georgia law drew attention. A Baltimore paper reprinted the law’s provisions and a notice of both the Georgia and South Carolina legislation appeared in a Washington paper.<sup>72</sup> Publications in Washington, Alexandria, Lexington, and Baltimore printed notices when Louisiana prohibited traders in 1826.<sup>73</sup> According to a Virginian, the law’s enactment dropped the value of slaves in the Old Dominion by twenty-five percent two hours after its passage was known in Richmond.<sup>74</sup> When

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<sup>70</sup> Nathaniel H. Harrison to William A. Harrison, 23 Mar. 1832, Hooe-Harrison Papers, University of Virginia.

<sup>71</sup> W. Poindexter to Isaac Jarratt, 26 Jan. 1832, in Jarratt-Puryear Papers, Duke.

<sup>72</sup> *Baltimore American*, 16 Jan. 1817; *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 15 Feb. 1817.

<sup>73</sup> *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 20 May 1826, pp. 262-63; *Alexandria Phenix Gazette*, 31 Mar. 1826; *Lexington Intelligencer*, 25 May 1826; *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 29 July 1826, p. 382.

<sup>74</sup> Speech of Abel Upshur at the 1829 Virginia Convention, as quoted in Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1854; reprint, Salem, N. H., 1987), p. 289; Abdy, *Journal of a Residence*, 2: 249.

Louisiana prohibited the trade following Nat Turner's rebellion, newspapers in North Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia printed comments on the law.<sup>75</sup>

The states that imported slaves kept close watch on other legislation. When the Georgia legislature passed a prohibitive law in 1817, that state's residents knew that South Carolina had just prohibited the entry of all slaves. South Carolina, in turn, kept up with activities in Georgia.<sup>76</sup> When Louisiana prohibited traders in 1826, notices appeared in other southern states. The Huntsville *Southern Advocate* applauded the law because it was a "death blow" to the "barbarous kidnappers" who "doomed [free blacks] to a life of slavery and wretchedness."<sup>77</sup> Once Louisiana prohibited speculators from bringing slaves into that state, one reader of the *Natchez Ariel* argued that Mississippi should follow suit. Louisiana had all the advantages, the paper felt, because planters from that state sent their agents to select the best slaves in Natchez, and left the "refuse" behind.<sup>78</sup> One publication predicted the Louisiana law would end the slave trade and slavery itself. In a bit of wishful thinking, the *Western Luminary* agreed with an editorial from New York that opined the law would do "more to hasten the abolition of slavery...than any measure which has yet been adopted." If the other states of the

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<sup>75</sup> Milledgeville *Southern Recorder*, 27 Oct. 1831; *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, 27 Oct. 1831; *Richmond Enquirer*, 2 Dec., 6 Dec. 1831. See also *Niles' Weekly Register*, 10 Dec. 1831, p. 266.

<sup>76</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 1 Jan. 1831; Charleston *Southern Patriot*, 15 Feb. 1817; *Charleston Courier*, 15 Dec. 1817. Louisiana residents also knew of the Georgia law (New Orleans *Louisiana Gazette*, 25 Feb. 1818).

<sup>77</sup> Huntsville *Southern Advocate*, 23 June 1826.

<sup>78</sup> Undated *Natchez Ariel*, as quoted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 4 July 1827, p. 6 (quotation); *Woodville Republican*, 8 Jan. 1827.

Lower South closed their borders to slaves, then slaveholders in Virginia would support the American Colonization Society because they would have no other way to deal with their “excess” slaves.<sup>79</sup>

No such thing happened, of course, since the laws often went unheeded and unenforced. William Beverley scoffed at Alabama’s attempt to control the importation of slaves in the wake of Nat Turner’s rebellion. He wrote his father that the law prohibiting the activities of speculators “was not in the least regarded while it existed.” Beverley saw “traders in Tuskaloosa selling [slaves] under the noses of the legislators.”<sup>80</sup> Although the rate dwindled, speculators still imported slaves into New Orleans following Louisiana’s two bans and some advertisements appeared in the newspapers.<sup>81</sup>

While open defiance was one strategy, traders were clever enough to find ways to evade the laws. One common complaint about prohibitory legislation was that it contained too many loopholes by which the speculators found a “mode of creeping out” of any penalties. One method was for traders to pose as immigrants and hire out their slaves for the term of eighty or ninety years.<sup>82</sup> As we have seen regarding the Georgia

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<sup>79</sup> *Western Luminary*, 14 June 1826, p. 780.

<sup>80</sup> William Beverley to Robert Beverley, 10 Jan. 1833, Beverley Family Papers.

<sup>81</sup> For example, see Bernard Raux’s shipment of thirty-five slaves from Norfolk to New Orleans on 2 Mar. 1827 (New Orleans Inward Slave Manifests) and the ad for a “CHOICE lot of young negroes” who are acclimated to Louisiana’s climate (New Orleans *Louisiana Advertiser*, 3 Oct. 1826). Generally speaking, fewer speculators advertised in Louisiana newspapers during the trade bans.

<sup>82</sup> Augusta *Herald*, 9 Dec. 1816, as quoted in the Charleston *Courier*, 15 Dec. 1817 (quotation); Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 12 Aug. 1817.

law, slave traders like Woolfolk and Joseph Wood brought coffles to the state's borders and waited for residents to cross into South Carolina before consummating a sale.

Wood advertised that his depot, just across the Savannah River in Hamburg, was stocked with "a likely parcel of Virginia Negroes."<sup>83</sup> By this means traders obeyed the law's letter but not its spirit, since the practical effect was merely to shift the point of sale to another location without excising the trader from the transaction. The purchaser then legally brought slaves into the state, since they were for his own use.<sup>84</sup>

Laws requiring certificates of good character for slaves were similarly ineffective. One Louisiana man bought twelve slaves who had been convicted in Maryland but pardoned on condition of their transportation out of the state. Such slaves obviously should have been prohibited from entering Louisiana, but were not. That he could get away with his actions was a testament that justice was "often both lame and blind in Louisiana." A Baton Rouge paper expressed indignation at the fact that speculators publicly announced their willingness to purchase slaves who lacked the necessary certificates. When needed, however, "certificates of the necessary kind are forthcoming!"<sup>85</sup> Bacon Tait, a Richmond slave trader, could have solved any mysteries for the newspaper. Tait tutored a fellow speculator on the finer points of evading a Mississippi law requiring certificates of good character. He dismissed the paperwork as

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<sup>83</sup> Advertisement of Joseph Wood, as quoted in William Jay, *A View of the Action of the Federal Government in behalf of Slavery* (New York, 1839), p. 78.

<sup>84</sup> *Liberator*, 21 Apr. 1832, p. 62.

<sup>85</sup> New Orleans *Mercantile Advertiser*, 29 Dec. 1826, as quoted in Woodville *Republican*, 8 Jan. 1827 (first quotation); *Baton Rouge Gazette*, 15 Oct. 1831 (second quotation).

“more trouble than profit,” but advised his friend Paul Pascal to have the certificates “to prevent the possibility of a difficulty.” Since “you can put as many negroes as you please” on one certificate, Tait told Pascal to bring one along. The “usual way” to obtain a certificate was to get two freeholders to look at the slave coffle and then sign off that they were of good character. Tait graciously provided a copy of the certificate in which the signers swore that the slaves “have not been guilty or convicted of murder, Burglary or arson or any other felony.”<sup>86</sup> Armfield told fellow slave trader Rice Ballard how to handle the laws that required certificates. Armfield was preparing a pre-printed form that left spaces for the purchaser’s name and the slave’s price. He could take the form to a justice of the peace, who would sign it, and have his clerk testify that Armfield was “a Hell of a fellow under his hand and the seal of the clerks office.” The miserly Armfield anticipated there would be “no difficulty” getting the receipts printed, but resented “paying those dam<sup>d</sup> Rascalls for making of them.”<sup>87</sup> Regarding the laws of all types, one trader simply said they presented “no important difficulty,” while an observer succinctly noted that “Means will be found to evade the laws.”<sup>88</sup>

Slave traders could evade the laws because it was virtually impossible to distinguish between the different types of slave migration in the South. A Georgia newspaper affirmed this idea when it concluded it could not differentiate between “the

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<sup>86</sup> Bacon Tait to Nathaniel Courier, 4 Oct. 1832, Pascal Papers.

<sup>87</sup> John Armfield to Rice C. Ballard, 26 Jan. 1832, Ballard Papers.

<sup>88</sup> *African Observer*, May 1827, p. 54 (first quotation); J. D. Paxton, *Letters on Slavery; Addressed to the Cumberland Congregation, Virginia* (Lexington, Ken., 1833), p. 29 (second quotation).

trader for profit from the citizen buying for his own use.”<sup>89</sup> Migrants who brought slaves with them or planters who bought bondservants in the Upper South were engaged in activity that elided with the trade. Citizens who migrated with their slaves, however, carefully distinguished themselves from speculators even though their activity was virtually indistinguishable on a practical level. The laws that singled out traders for exclusion upheld the fiction that the slave trade was completely separate from bondservants who migrated with their masters.

It was difficult, moreover, to keep track of which slaves entered a state. Many of the laws asked citizens and traders to register with the local court system or the justice of the peace. Besides being onerous, such activity was ineffective. Lack of desire for strong government intervention and the rural nature of the South combined to ensure the laws would be difficult to enforce. Itinerant traders were involved in much of the interstate slave trade and keeping track of their transactions was next to impossible. Those who wished to avoid registering their slaves or wanted to import them illegally usually could do so with impunity. Furthermore, slave traders could pass through a “closed” state on their way to an “open” state. When they entered the “closed” state they were initially complying with the law, but while on the march they could easily sell slaves. The provisions that allowed emigrants to bring in slaves for their own use provided a cover for slave traders who claimed they were moving to the state.<sup>90</sup> Even those traders who operated primarily in the urban areas could sell with

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<sup>89</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 23 Oct. 1830.

<sup>90</sup> Hall, *Travels in North America*, 2: 219-20.



impunity, as there was no desire to clamp down on scofflaws. Most often the legislation became a burden for those it was intended to help. Louisiana's 1832 law did not last because it was a "greater inconvenience to the citizens of the state, than its framers had foreseen."<sup>91</sup>

The demand for slaves was too intense for the southern states to regulate commerce in bondservants. Thomas Dew knew that the non-importation laws were more sound than fury. He observed that as long as the demand for slaves existed, "the supply will be furnished in some way or other." Dew noted that the price of slaves in Virginia rose instead of fell after Louisiana enacted its 1832 law. He attributed the increase to the large volume of southern purchasers in the state. They looked for bargains, since Virginians were "frightened into a determination to get clear of their slaves at all costs." He correctly predicted that the storm would blow over and Louisiana would no longer be in a position to deny itself what it needed to sustain its agricultural system.<sup>92</sup> One slave trader in Louisiana knew he only had to wait for the legislature to reverse the laws against speculators. He confidently predicted that residents would come to their senses and demand repeal. When that happened, he knew that "the Niggers will augment in price."<sup>93</sup>

If the laws were so "utterly inefficient," then it is curious why all of the states that imported slaves wrestled with whether or not to forbid the activities of speculators

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<sup>91</sup> Ingraham, *South-West by a Yankee*, 1: 181.

<sup>92</sup> Dew, "Review of the Debate," p. 361.

<sup>93</sup> Paul Pascal to Bernard Raux, 24 Dec. 1831 (translation from the French), Pascal Papers.

and only Mississippi did not enact legislation designed to thwart traders' activities.

Lawmakers in the Deep South knew that other legislatures tried, and failed, to cope with the issues surrounding the importation of slaves. It is puzzling why they would enact measures that were proven to be ineffective and then leave some of them on the books for years.<sup>94</sup> There were a variety of motives that gave rise to the laws and it was only when several factors combined that states tried to regulate the interstate slave trade. A latent opposition to the slave trade and traders existed in the South, but some type of leading issue had to gain credence for legislation to become popular enough to be supported. Furthermore, most of the laws were directly connected to abuses associated with the slave trade and concerned the activities of slave traders. Such attitudes involved negative consequences for the state, misgivings for what the trade did to the slaves, doubt as to traders' character, and fear for what the slaves would do once they arrived.<sup>95</sup>

The hesitant and half-hearted attempts to regulate the interstate slave trade reveal a divided mind in the Deep South. Unlike the Upper South, residents of importing states were not primarily concerned with the negative effects of speculation. Legislation from the Lower South reveals that citizens there were just as concerned with controlling the slave population as they were with stopping the activities of speculators.

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<sup>94</sup> Hall, *Travels in North America*, 2: 219.

<sup>95</sup> Those Deep South residents who disagreed with slavery despised the slave trade. A thriving slave market increased slavery's power and made colonization or manumission impractical. As opposition to slavery withered, so did opposition to the interstate slave trade (Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 4 Dec. 1821; *Western Luminary*, 29 Aug. 1827).

Most of the laws regulating the trade also circumscribed the activities of all slaves or free blacks. Legislators accepted the fact that the slave population would increase and concentrated on reducing the possibilities of a rebellion. To that end, they tried to prevent the importation of undesirable bondservants but permit the entry of tractable slaves. Legislators thus made a distinction, however fuzzy, between the slaves who accompanied migrants and those who were found in slave traders' coffles. In reality there was no essential difference between the two groups, so it appears that whites projected their worst assumptions of slavery on the slave trade and tried to ease their fears by passing legislation that could not, or would not, be enforced.

One vein of resentment towards the slave trade was that it could bankrupt the state since cash tended to flow out when citizens bought a large number of slaves. Complaints were usually not heard during flush times, but only when the economy turned sluggish. Speculators became a convenient target. A Georgia resident grouched about how the trade stripped the state of money, even while leaving it with slaves who were "worse than nothing." One trader blamed adverse legislation on people's perceptions that they paid too much for slaves.<sup>96</sup> The 1827 Alabama act was, in part, a reaction to the panic of 1825. A depression in the cotton market led many to fear that too much money was being sent out of the state.<sup>97</sup> A couple of years later, a Natchez newspaper called for a ban on the importation of slaves. In deliberately not playing

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<sup>96</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 4 Dec. 1816 (quotation); James R. Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 14 Dec. 1831, Ballard Papers.

<sup>97</sup> Abernethy, *Formative Period*, p. 167. That the 1825 panic led to the 1827 act is inferred from their proximity in time and the experience of other states. There is no extant primary source that links the two.

upon the “mawkish sensibilities” of the state’s residents, it sensed potential danger in the combination of the cotton market’s decline and the increase in the number of slaves. The paper assumed that the Louisiana importation ban gave residents of that state a great advantage. They could visit Mississippi and select the best slaves. The result left Mississippi with undesirable bondservants. Further compounding the situation was Virginia and Maryland’s determination to “get rid of a population that is at once an expense and a nuisance to the people.” If the legislature did not act, citizens must brace for the state’s “ultimate ruin.”<sup>98</sup> People in New Orleans, for instance, condemned the slave trade after the panic of 1836. Ignoring their complicity, they blamed it for putting “millions into the pockets of people living between the Roanoke, and Mason and Dixon’s line.”<sup>99</sup> Since Louisiana was the largest importer of slaves, that state struggled with the amount of money that left the state in the pockets of speculators. In a wide-ranging address, Louisiana Governor Jacques Dupre outlined several reasons why the state should prohibit slave traders from doing business in his state. He began with a sketch of the sugar trade, noting how the other southern states tried to lower the sugar tariff. He pointed out that Louisiana bought luxuries, necessities, slave clothing, steam engines, and machinery from these states. The largest expense was slaves, which

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<sup>98</sup> Undated *Natchez Ariel*, as quoted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 4 July 1827, p. 6. *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 1 Dec. 1827, p. 211, in noting the Mississippi complaints, admitted that the “very worst of our population” was going to the south and west. A “good riddance, perhaps, to us, but not, we should suppose, a valuable acquisition in a quarter of our country so much overloaded with slaves.”

<sup>99</sup> *New Orleans Courier*, 15 Feb. 1839.

amounted to \$2,500,000 annually. The result was widespread debt, so Dupre proposed prohibiting the entry of all slaves into Louisiana.<sup>100</sup>

At least one resident commended Dupre for his “wisdom and frankness” on the issue. He thought low prices and the probable repeal of the tariff would combine with the purchase of slaves to produce “an abyss of insolvency.” Only the states that opposed continuation of the tariff and sell their slaves to Louisiana would benefit from the legislature’s refusal to pass the law. Such states had been “little grateful” for the “outlet” Louisiana gave for the “most dangerous” portion of their population.<sup>101</sup> The reader later claimed an “almost unanimous voice” that clamored for an end to the “scourge” that introduced into Louisiana “every thing that is vicious and abominable.” He wondered if Louisiana would become like Jamaica, a country that needed twelve thousand soldiers to keep the peace. The reader reasoned that the welfare of a “few speculators” should not come before the security of Louisiana’s population.<sup>102</sup>

William Haile, a cotton planter, disagreed. He doubted such a law could be permanent in “a country like Louisiana” with “so much valuable land in a state of nature.” Haile recognized the desire of men like himself who wanted to buy slaves so that they could expand their planting operations, even if doing so required debt. He

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 7 Jan. 1831. Dupre’s estimate may have been close. Assuming an average price of \$500, Louisiana residents would have purchased five thousand slaves in a year (price information in Freudenberger and Pritchett, “Domestic Slave Trade,” p. 457). For South Carolina’s reaction to Dupre’s message, see *Charleston Southern Times*, as reprinted in *New Orleans Courier*, 9 Feb. 1831. The *Courier* also took the opportunity to register its disapproval of nullification

<sup>101</sup> *New Orleans Courier*, 13 Jan. 1831.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 22 Jan. 1831.

ventured several guesses as to who might support such a law. Noting the governor's heritage, Haile thought maybe the "french would like to stop the tide of emigration to the state" so they may continue to control the government. Perhaps the slave traders and the money brokers in New Orleans were the ones behind the law. Haile felt the law would "enable the traders to sell their negroes on time."<sup>103</sup> The legislature remained unmoved by the governor, while the committee dealing with the introduction of slaves reported against the expediency of immediate prohibition. Most likely it reasoned that the 1826 law proved ineffective, so there was no reason to believe the current law would be any more efficacious.<sup>104</sup>

Even more than fears about the currency drain, residents of the importing states were worried that they were trading money for the potential of rebellion. The number of slaves arriving in New Orleans, a local commented, have "added fearfully" to the number of bondservants in the state. This growing disparity between the black and white population was a fact too alarming "to be viewed with indifference." Ships arriving in New Orleans are "freighted with a living cargo of vice and crime, to be disgorged upon our shores." The probable result was too terrible to mention.<sup>105</sup> Louisiana's governor devoted most of his public pronouncements after the Nat Turner rebellion to elaborating upon this theme. After quelling any fears that rogue slaves had

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<sup>103</sup> Robert Haile to Douglas Hamilton, 21 Jan. 1830, William S. Hamilton Papers, Louisiana State University.

<sup>104</sup> New Orleans *Courier*, 21 Jan. 1831; *Liberator*, 26 Mar. 1831, p. 51.

<sup>105</sup> Undated New Orleans *Louisiana Advertiser*, as quoted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 22 Jan. 1830, p. 155 (first quotation); New Orleans *Courier*, 7 Jan. 1831 (second quotation).

crossed Louisiana's border, governor Roman drew attention to census information. He was alarmed at the growing inequality between the white and slave populations.

Louisiana had already received too many slaves that were the "scum" of Virginia's population. Roman thought the "total prohibition of slaves into this State" for a few years was the only way of "avoid the danger with which we are now threatened." The only possible exception to the ban could be slaves brought in by bona fide emigrants.<sup>106</sup> Governor Brandon of Mississippi expressed similar concerns to his constituents. After passage of Louisiana's 1827 law, Brandon wondered whether his state would become "the only receptacle for the surplus black population of the middle states." The "vast number" entering Mississippi "has excited uneasiness in the minds of many of our fellow citizens."<sup>107</sup>

The influx of bondservants who flooded the importing states heightened the fear of a slave rebellion. Southerners frequently overestimated the potential for revolt and too often were paralyzed by fears of destruction and bloodshed. There were, however, enough instances of revolt (all of them unsuccessful) to keep the idea a massive slave rebellion alive.<sup>108</sup> A Georgia resident fanned the flames by noting that in his county two hundred voters lived amidst seven thousand slaves. With such a grim outlook, Georgians should not sleep until they corrected the situation. "The attempt at

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<sup>106</sup> *Senate Journal of the tenth extra session* (New Orleans, 1832), pp. 1-3 (quotations on pp. 2, 3); New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, 16 Nov. 1831.

<sup>107</sup> *Woodville Republican*, 8 Jan. 1828.

<sup>108</sup> Clement Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South* (Durham, N. C., 1940), pp. 89-96, 116.

Richmond, Va. and lately at Camden, S. C. should be a warning to us,” he gravely admonished his fellow citizens. Matters would only get worse, since a reported 13,000 slaves crossed the Yadkin River in the last three months and up to 50,000 entered the state in the last year.<sup>109</sup> The preposterous estimate and the apocalyptic rhetoric reveal more about the writer’s state of mind than about the slave trade itself. A wild importation figure such as this reflected the fear of a slave population that was growing exponentially and a white population that was virtually stagnant. Even as owners bought more slaves in order to expand their holdings, they also feared that the very slaves they imported would rise up and destroy white civilization. A. L. C. Magruder carefully recorded his thoughts on the subject in a leather book, evidently preparing for a debate on the potential of barring slave traders in Mississippi. He attacked the “barbarous and inhuman men” who seized free persons and sold them as slaves. The growth of the “pestiferous” and “troublesome” slave population was due mainly to the demand of “lazy, slothful persons” who delight to spend their time in idleness. Their selfishness would eventually cause “an overflow” of slaves and lead to an insurrection. The example of St. Domingo was fresh in Magruder’s mind. If Mississippi did not act, the result would be the shedding of “much blood.” There were just too many “evil consequences” to justify the importation of slaves.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 4 Dec. 1816. Such numbers were, of course, ridiculously high, but fear drove the estimates.

<sup>110</sup> Manuscript of A. L. C. Magruder, 19 Mar. 1828, James Trudeman Magruder Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History. That Magruder was preparing for a formal debate is inferred from his opening statement that he will “now rise to prove, if possible by my few, and disjointed remarks” that prohibiting the work of slave traders would be beneficial.



For southerners who worried about the potential of a slave revolt, the specter of St. Domingo was “unforgettable” and provided a terrible example.<sup>111</sup> In fighting for the bill to outlaw the entry of slaves into South Carolina, John O’Neale described “the horrors of the San Domingo revolution” and the “consequent massacre.”<sup>112</sup> A grand jury in Putnam County, Georgia held similar beliefs. In an official statement it argued that the entry of too many slaves would cause the state to become like the “ensanguined fields of St. Domingo.” Two years later a Georgia citizen repeated the slogan to argue that slaves were a “*domestic enemy*” and should not be allowed to grow in force.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, Magruder feared that an influx of bondservants “might give rise to an insurrection” like the one in St. Domingo that would lead to “the expulsion of all the whites.”<sup>114</sup>

Those who cited Haiti’s example may or may not have wanted to prohibit the activities of slave traders since reference to it was not necessary to persuade others that slave traders were potentially dangerous for the South. The notion that speculators bought and sold undesirable slaves was firmly fixed in heads of most southerners. Thus, it was not just the addition of more slaves that scared these southerners, but the purchase of the wrong kind of slaves. A grand jury in Putnam County made just this

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<sup>111</sup> Eaton, *Freedom-of-Thought*, p. 89.

<sup>112</sup> “Memoir of John O’Neale,” pp. 63, John O’Neale Papers.

<sup>113</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 6 Nov. 1816 (first quotation), 29 Sept. 1818 (second quotation; emphasis in original).

<sup>114</sup> Manuscript of A. L. C. Magruder, 19 Apr. 1828, John T. Magruder Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

point. It labeled the introduction of slaves into Georgia by slave traders as a “demoralizing tendency” that had “dangerous consequences.” No evidence was needed to support the assertion that speculators brought in slaves “of the very worst cast, *corrupting those already among us, and ready at all times for insurrection and crime.*”<sup>115</sup> A Natchez judge was concerned that slaves entering Mississippi brought evils that were “almost incalculable.” Slaves brought in by speculators “corrupt the moral atmosphere of the country; degrade by their vices and by their examples, the state and reputation of the society in which they mingle, and continually jeopardise by their very presence, the property and lives of good and peaceable men.” One southerner despaired when he thought of how those who patronized slave traders might one day cause the state to be plunged into a “war of extermination.” Slave traders had the worst kind of slaves imaginable for sale, and these malcontents would only “scatter firebrands among the combustibles.”<sup>116</sup> A New Orleans paper agreed, noting how “the vilest criminals were often vomited on our shores.” Residents of Georgia, too, felt they were receiving slaves “of the very worst characters.” Such bondservants were “often taken out of jails, pardoned perhaps for some crime on condition of being sent out of state.” It was rumored that the jails of North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland, and Virginia were opened so that their convict slaves could be brought to Georgia.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 6 Nov. 1816. Emphasis in original.

<sup>116</sup> *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 28 Sept. 1828, p. 19 (first quotation); Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 13 Oct. 1818 (second and third quotations).

<sup>117</sup> New Orleans *Mercantile Advertiser*, 29 Dec. 1826, as quoted in *Woodville Republican*, 8 Jan. 1827 (first quotation); Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 12 Aug. 1817 (second quotation), 4 Dec. 1821.

The New Orleans city council was alarmed the city was gaining a reputation as a dumping ground for the undesirable slaves of the Upper South. It petitioned the legislature in 1816 to do something to prevent the entry of convict slaves into the state. A report circulated that a ship from New York was filled with a "great number" of slaves who were condemned to hard labor and headed to New Orleans.<sup>118</sup> This came on top of reports that a ship full of convict slaves had already landed in the Crescent City. Governor William C. C. Claiborne became so alarmed at the prospect of hordes of unruly slaves being unloaded in his state that he asked the legislature to take swift action. He called for passage of a measure that would "prevent slaves of such character from being let loose among the good people of this state and wholly to put down so disgraceful a traffic."<sup>119</sup> The legislature promptly approved a law barring the entry of slaves convicted of murder, rape, arson, manslaughter, burglary, or insurrection.<sup>120</sup> Almost as if to confirm the suspicions of those who voted for the law, an "inhuman speculator from New York" unsuccessfully tried to bring seventy or eighty convict slaves into the state within a month of the measure's approval.<sup>121</sup> Dupre, governor more

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<sup>118</sup> *A Digest of the Ordinances, Resolutions, By-laws and Regulations of the Corporation of New-Orleans, and a Collection of the Laws of the Legislature relative to the said City* (New Orleans, 1836), p. 97.

<sup>119</sup> *Louisiana House Journal*, First Session, Third Legislature (New Orleans, 1817), pp. 22-23.

<sup>120</sup> *Louisiana Senate Journal*, First Session, Third Legislature (New Orleans, 1817), p. 30; *New Orleans Louisiana Courier*, 19 Feb. 1817; Taylor, *Slavery in Louisiana*, p. 37; *Niles' Weekly Register*, 15 Feb. 1817, p. 399; *Charleston Southern Patriot*, 21 Feb. 1817. Since the burden of proof was on the importer, a certificate from the clerk of court in the importing county was sufficient to prove good character.

<sup>121</sup> *Niles' Weekly Register*, 15 Feb. 1817, p. 399.

than a decade later, complained how the slaveholding ships came “freighted with a living cargo of vice and crime, to be disgorged upon our shores.”<sup>122</sup> Having the largest slave market in the South was a blessing and a curse. The large volume of slave sales sometimes led Louisiana residents to feel they received the worst slaves. At one point, a paper drew a parallel between the domestic and the African trades. It noted that the former was more dangerous, since there was no comparison “between the ability and inclination to do mischief possessed by the Virginia negro, and that of the rude and ignorant African.”<sup>123</sup> Louisiana residents were not the only ones to complain.

Governor David Holmes of Mississippi urged the new legislature to act immediately to “put an end to this odious traffic.” Even though stopping the trade was impossible, the legislature could still strive to “lessen the evil.” Slaves of the “most vicious character” were to be found in trader’s coffles, so some action must be taken.<sup>124</sup>

The statements of southerners who assumed a thriving slave trade increased the risks of a rebellion reveal much about their underlying attitudes toward the peculiar institution. They recognized the exploitative nature of slavery and made no apology for it. Rather than wringing their hands over the blatant commercialism of the slave trade, most residents of the Deep South viewed speculation as a natural consequence slavery. They did, however, recognize the possible excesses of slavery’s commercial tendencies in that speculators would try to buy inferior slaves and sell them at high prices. The genesis of the stereotype of interstate slave traders, then, came from the assumptions of

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<sup>122</sup> New Orleans *Courier*, 7 Jan. 1831.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 Feb. 1839.

the Lower South residents. Over time, the prevailing attitudes in the Upper South changed to conform to the rest of the South.

Residents of the states that imported slaves believed that traders would do almost anything to make money. Many southerners assumed that speculators, especially itinerant traders with whom they were not familiar, concealed the true identity of slaves. Traders were known to use various techniques to make slaves appear younger, such as blacking or plucking gray hair, and rubbing grease on the skin to make slaves appear more youthful. It became widely believed that traders altered their slaves before putting them on the market. William Wells Brown, a slave who worked for a trader named Walker, helped prepare the “old” slaves for market. When Walker brought his slaves down the Mississippi River he ordered Brown “to have the old men’s whiskers shaved off, and the grey hairs plucked out where they were not too numerous, in which case he had a preparation of blacking to color it, and with a blacking brush we would put it on.” At completion of the process, Brown thought some of the slaves looked up to fifteen years younger than they had just a few minutes before. To complete the ruse, Walker “taught” the slaves their new ages. Since Walker transported his slaves on flatboats where they could be seen by whites, Brown tellingly explained that these operations took place in a room out of the sight of passengers, lest they discover that the trader was altering the condition of his slaves. The proof of the process’s efficacy was testified to by Brown, who thought that some of the people who bought slaves from Walker “were dreadfully cheated, especially in the ages of the

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<sup>124</sup> Natchez *Mississippi State Gazette*, 1 Mar. 1818. The governor presented his message on 7 Oct. 1817.

slaves whom they bought.”<sup>125</sup> John Knight, writing from Natchez, complained that since traders were “generally such liars,” purchasers “know nothing whatever” of the slaves they bought. Buyers, he concluded, had to “judge by the *looks* of the negroes, endeavouring to avoid getting *old* rascals.”<sup>126</sup> Besides altering the physical appearance of slaves, speculators also dressed their bondservants in new clothing. Buyers were more likely to assume that a clean, well-dressed slave would be easier to manage than one who was dirty and clad in rags. One Georgian complained of how the tidy appearance of a speculator’s drove of “well dressed, good looking negroes” concealed the fact that they had been convicted of crimes and were on their way to Alabama.<sup>127</sup>

While traders changed the outward appearance of slaves, they also tried to conceal inner qualities that might hinder a sale. The experience of Henry Bibb demonstrates how one trader erased problematic aspects of the slave’s past. Bibb had twice run away from his master before the man, out of exasperation, sold him to a speculator. When prospective purchasers asked Bibb if he ever had run away before, the trader quickly answered that Bibb was a model slave who had never tried to flee. The speculator even pressured Bibb to act piously and appear to be a Christian so that

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<sup>125</sup> Bontemps, ed., *Great Slave Narratives*, p. 40. Theophilus Freeman, a trader operating out of New Orleans, engaged in much the same activity (Boney, ed., *Slave Life in Georgia*, p. 96).

<sup>126</sup> John Knight to William M. Beall, 18 Mar. 1844, John Knight Papers. Emphasis in original.

<sup>127</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 4 Dec. 1821. Traders in the African trade, of course, used similar methods to dupe purchasers (Daniel P. Mannix and Malcolm Cowley, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1514-1865* (New York: Viking Press, 1962), pp. 127-30).

someone would regard him as being docile and want to purchase him.<sup>128</sup> Speculators' attempts to erase the past of the bondservants indicated that they regarded a slave's life as something malleable that had little importance. More importantly, these questionable practices contributed to the growing stereotype of slave traders. This "coaching" of slaves and the altering of their past became one of the chief complaints about traders. One southerner grumbled that people who bought slaves from speculators must be "circumspect," since "it is known that speculators *frequently* purchase slaves of the worst characters, because they can get them cheap."<sup>129</sup>

Traders in the Lower South became widely known for their shady business transactions since dissatisfied customers frequently hauled them into court. The legal records of the South were littered with the proceedings of citizens who were quick to look for legal assistance when they felt wronged in a slave sale. Theodore Hunter wrote to attorney Joseph H. Bryan for help in suing a "negro speculator" who sold Hunter an unhealthy slave who later died.<sup>130</sup> Bernard Kendig, a slave trader in New Orleans, was sued thirteen times in ten years. Four times there was no verdict in the case, once he was found not guilty, three times he was found guilty of fraud, three times he was found to have sold defective slaves, and twice he sold stolen slaves.<sup>131</sup> Lewis C. Robards of

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<sup>128</sup> Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (1850; reprint New York, 1969), p. 102.

<sup>129</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 10 Nov. 1818. Emphasis in original.

<sup>130</sup> Theodore Hunter, as quoted in Don H. Marr, Jr., "Slave Trading and Slave Traders in North Carolina," M. A. Thesis, East Carolina University, 1995, pp. 11-12.

<sup>131</sup> Richard Tansey, "Bernard Kendig and the New Orleans Slave Trade," *Louisiana History*, 23 (1982): 159-78.

Lexington, Kentucky, made frequent court appearances. He sold slaves who were subject to fits, were diseased, and had “nigger consumption.” Robards even seized and sold free blacks.<sup>132</sup> Citizens of the Lower South, then, were receptive to laws outlawing the trade because they hoped to purge their state of such malefactors. The underhanded dealings of speculators almost invited legislative intervention.

In Louisiana, the state with the largest market for importing slaves, warranties in the sale of slaves was the most common issue before the Louisiana Supreme Court in the fifty years prior to the Civil War. The situation became so acute that the state became the only one to support the right of redhibition through statute. In redhibition, the law specifically protected the buyer of a slave from any possible physical, moral, or mental defects of the slave. The state law forced the seller to declare any defects the bondservant possessed; silence on the subject assumed that the slave had no faults. If an undetected flaw became apparent, then the buyer could cancel the sale, return the slave, and get his or her money back. An alternate strategy was to demand a refund for a portion of the slave’s diminished value. In these cases, in effect, a new purchase price was determined by the court and the seller had to refund the difference between it and the original. Buyers of bondservants in other states had to rely on the judiciary to compensate them for any loss they suffered as the result of a sale, and Louisiana’s law was a response to the questionable business practices of the slave traders.<sup>133</sup> The presumption in Louisiana was that the trader was at fault, whether by omission or

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<sup>132</sup> J. Winston Coleman, Jr., “Lexington Slave Dealers and their Southern Trade,” *Filson Club Historical Quarterly*, 12 (1938): 12-14.

<sup>133</sup> Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court*, pp. 129-31.



commission, implies that Deep South residents were comfortable in defining the master-slave relationship in commercial terms. The speculation did not rankle citizens in this area, but the willful representation of fact did.

Itinerant traders, that is, ones without a fixed address in the importing states, were especially bothersome because they tended to get away with more frauds. Citizens were confident they could sue an established trader or make an appeal to return a defective slave to him because they could find him after the sale. There was no guarantee, however, that a purchaser would ever see an itinerant trader again. The potential for abuse and fraud was enormous. The New Orleans *Bee* grasped this point when it made the crucial distinction between types of traders in its city. In calling for a slave importation law that kept out the “worst” slaves, it sought protection “against the cupidity of the non resident seller, who can have but little regard for our domestic tranquility.” Such men, a Spartanburg, South Carolina, grand jury agreed, were “dangerous to the safety of the State.”<sup>134</sup> This class of speculators “always” bought the cheap and seemingly ubiquitous bad slaves. Such traders, who were utterly destitute of “sensibility and principle,” purchased a “villain” instead of a “good slave” and made twice the profit. Itinerant dealers of this type introduced the worst slaves imaginable because it was of “little consequence” to them. Such slaves would eventually “corrupt the entire mass of our colored population.”<sup>135</sup> Louisiana considered a law against

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<sup>134</sup> New Orleans *Bee*, 20 Dec. 1820 (first quotation); Spartanburg grand jury, as quoted in Henry, *Police Control*, p. 106 (second quotation).

<sup>135</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 13 Oct. 1818 (first four quotations); 4 Dec. 1821 (remaining quotations).

itinerant traders in 1831, about six months before the Turner rebellion. Isaac Franklin, an established trader who was not a Louisiana resident, was “Foilled and bedeviled” when he heard the news. He confessed he was never “so much at a loss in all my Trading.”<sup>136</sup> Franklin accused the legislature of trying “to close every Avenue to the Trade.” He told a fellow speculator he was “using all my influence with the members” to thwart the measure. In its present form, the bill would “make the Negroes on the way [to Louisiana] be [li]able to seizure.” A “depressed” Franklin confided that he might have to become a citizen of Louisiana. Should his efforts fail, “god knows what will be the consequences.”<sup>137</sup> Fortunately for Franklin, the measure did not become law.

Southerners formed opinions about itinerant traders based on their dealings with them or the stories of others. The reputation of itinerant traders quickly sunk, something that caused trouble for a resident of Tennessee who tried to sell his own slaves. Will White of Nashville tried to sell at least nine of his slaves in Natchez. His frustration mounted at not being able to get as much as he had hoped for the bondservants. He told his wife that several persons would not buy his slave John outright but wanted to take the man on a trial basis. They hesitated to purchase the man, “allegding [sic] that a great number of deceptions have been practiced by traders.” White was in a difficult position, because he did not visit Natchez regularly, and so taking the slave back would be a cumbersome problem. All he wanted, he wrote his

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<sup>136</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 20 Feb. 1831, Ballard Papers.

<sup>137</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 28 Feb. 1831, Ibid.

wife, was a “fair profit” or he would bring John back to Tennessee.<sup>138</sup> A Virginia resident summed up the feelings that many had for itinerant traders when he advised his son to buy slaves from a local resident. He thought dealing with a speculator was risky, because “it is best to get one [slave] that is well known: For it is hasardous buying strange Negros.”<sup>139</sup> One Tennessee resident learned this lesson the hard way. He bought a slave from an itinerant trader at night, only to have his overseer tell him the next day that the slave had no toes on his feet. The seller stuffed cotton in the man’s shoes to accomplish a “base and monstrous imposition.”<sup>140</sup>

The distrust of itinerant traders coexisted with the vague notion that residents of the Upper South were trying to jettison the worst of their slaves. Deep South citizens could assume such because they would probably have done the same thing. Other than for debt or some calamitous circumstance, the sale of a slave who was, on the surface at least, contented and a good worker made little sense. Those who purchased slaves were often wary about which slave they bought since, put in the same situation, they would probably have sold the worst of their slaves and kept the best for themselves. One Georgian described the slaves found in a trader’s coffles as “incendiaries, poisoners and murderers, who cannot be convicted.” Such malcontents were “reserved till the Georgia negro buyer comes along.” It is no wonder that the “worst kind are generally sent to

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<sup>138</sup> Will White to Eliza White, 20 Apr. 1821, Felix Grundy Papers.

<sup>139</sup> John Callaway to Dr. Henry G. Callaway, 16 Jan. 1809, Pocket Plantation Papers, University of Virginia.

<sup>140</sup> As quoted in Mooney, *Slavery in Tennessee*, pp. 35-36.

us.”<sup>141</sup> A Louisiana resident whined that citizens of Virginia and Maryland were ungrateful for the “outlet we have hitherto afforded them for the most dangerous part of their population.” He asked the legislature to put a stop to slave speculation in the state.<sup>142</sup> When slaves in Virginia went bad or became unprofitable because of running away or stealing, owners thought it justifiable to “save themselves from loss.” Their prudent response was to sell their difficult slaves.<sup>143</sup> Maryland residents, a Natchez newspaper thought, viewed the slave trader as a benefactor because he bought the “rogues and vagabonds” and sent them south.<sup>144</sup> It made perfect sense to assume that slaveholders in other states would “generally and very naturally, sell their worst slaves first.” In this manner they would “gradually throw off their black population, and especially the vicious part of it.” The “unprincipled speculator” abetted this heinous work because he bought up convict slaves and sent them to the “deluded” states to the south and west.<sup>145</sup> A Washington paper, in observing that Mississippi complained about convict slaves, admitted that there was “no doubt” that the “very worst of our colored

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<sup>141</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 4 Dec. 1816

<sup>142</sup> New Orleans *Courier*, 13 Jan. 1831. The next week the same writer chastised those legislators who did not want to stop slave imports. He wondered if they wished “to reduce Louisiana to the fate of Jamaica, which is obliged to maintain a garrison of ten or twelve thousand soldiers.” (Ibid., 20 Jan. 1831).

<sup>143</sup> *Niles' Weekly Register*, 14 Sept. 1822, p. 18.

<sup>144</sup> Undated Natchez *Ariel*, as quoted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 4 July 1827, p. 7.

<sup>145</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 13 Oct. 1818.

population has long been passing to the south-west.” This process was “good riddance” for Virginia and Maryland, but not for Mississippi.<sup>146</sup>

Residents of the Deep South were not only concerned about the unruly, rebellious, or convict slaves in a trader’s coffles, but some had fears about kidnapped freemen who might also be in shackles. A “few” of the slaves sold in Georgia were “stolen from the owners and others who were born free are kidnapped.”<sup>147</sup> Those who considered the matter wondered why the citizens of Georgia would permit abducted slaves to enter their state. Such slaves were likely to seek liberty “at any cost, and at every sacrifice,” and their example would make it difficult to preserve order.<sup>148</sup> One Georgian thought the “most horrid feature of the internal slave trade” was the “seizure and sale of persons of color as free by the law of nature and the laws of the land, as the persons who steal them.” He was concerned that his state would become known as an easy destination for kidnapped blacks and that they would cause the other slaves in Georgia to seek their freedom.<sup>149</sup> The underlying fear of those who gave any thought to the illegal traffic in freemen and apprentices was that the entire system of slavery would become unstable through the efforts of a few troublemakers, both white and black.

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<sup>146</sup> *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 1 Dec. 1827, p. 211. There are few examples of Upper South residents who tried to calm such fears. The *Richmond Enquirer* vigorously disputed the assertion that Virginia residents sold slaves of questionable character, claiming that slaves sentenced to banishment from the Old Dominion were “not so vicious” as people might think (*Richmond Enquirer*, 2 Dec. 1831).

<sup>147</sup> *Milledgeville Georgia Journal*, 12 Aug. 1817.

<sup>148</sup> *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 19 July 1817, p. 323.

<sup>149</sup> *Milledgeville Georgia Journal*, 1 Sept. 1818. See *Ibid.*, 4 Dec. 1821 for another attack on kidnapping.

Whites broke the law and introduced a black element that was too closely associated with liberty. Slaveholders worried that abducted freemen would contaminate those slaves who, their owners thought, were content with their lives and who did not need to know about such dangerous ideas as freedom or independence. The fear of kidnapped freemen was confined mainly to Georgia since the kidnapping trade peaked around 1820. As fewer traders resorted to kidnapping, those states that received the bulk of the slaves were less concerned with the problem.

While the kidnapped freemen found in slave traders' coffles could infect slaves with ideas of liberty, it was common to assume that speculators trafficked in diseased bondservants. The prospect of sick slaves struck fear into the hearts of owners, since an epidemic could cripple a planter's workforce. Those who dealt with speculators had to be careful in all respects. James A. Tait, a planter in Alabama, knew that speculators often had diseased slaves and instructed his overseer not to allow any traders or their slaves on the property. Tait later fired the man for negligence, noting in his memoranda book that his former employee permitted "a negro speculator, with young negroes that had the [w]hooping cough, to stay all night on the plantation, whereby my little negroes took the cough." Four of "our little negroes" died as a result of their exposure to the disease.<sup>150</sup> It was commonly assumed that traders' jails were often the breeding ground for diseases of all types. Cities of the Lower South constantly faced epidemics, and the packing together of slaves in close quarters was a recipe for disaster. The two largest

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<sup>150</sup> Memoranda Book of James Tait, Tait Collection, Auburn University Archives, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama. James and Bacon Tait were apparently not related.

slave markets, Natchez and New Orleans, constantly battled with the slave traders over the issue of diseased bondservants. In 1833 a scandal involving sick slaves rocked Natchez. An unusually large number of slaves were available for sale, many of whom had cholera. Being “crowded” into the slave pens meant that they “endanger[ed] the lives of the citizens, and jeopardise[d] the interest of the city.” Many belonged to Franklin, who had brought about one hundred of them from Alexandria to New Orleans and then transferred them to a steamboat for the trip to Natchez. On the way up the Mississippi River, they were exposed to cold weather and “several” died. Franklin buried five in the public graveyard but then put up to eighteen others “into a deep ravine within the city. Their bodies were secretly, and in the night[,] deposited in holes formed under the banks of the ravine made by the rain, and only partially covered by earth thrown from the top of the bank.” The rains that washed the earth away from the shallow graves revealed a grisly scene.<sup>151</sup>

It was not the first time Franklin had dumped the bodies of slaves in a ravine. Five months earlier he had jokingly confided to a friend that “the way we send out Dead negroes at night and keep Dark [i.e., silent] is a sin.”<sup>152</sup> Franklin’s “sin” caught up to him. The coroner hastily convened an inquest, but the speculator could not give a satisfactory explanation when confronted with the evidence of his bungling attempts at

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<sup>151</sup> *Mississippi Journal and Natchez Advertiser*, 19 Apr. 1833 (quotations); *Natchez Mississippi Gazette*, 27 Mar. 1833; *Washington Mississippi Gazette*, 4 May 1833, as quoted in Stamp, *Peculiar Institution*, p. 250; M.W.B. to Richard Watkins, 14 July 1833, Palmore Family Papers, University of Virginia.

<sup>152</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 8 Dec. 1832, Ballard Papers. Franklin told Ballard that seven or eight of his slaves were sick, and the epidemic led to most trying times he had ever seen. He pledged, though, “I will not give up the shipp.”

a cover-up. Within two days, eighty-one of the town's citizen signed a petition that asked to expel all speculators and their slaves from the city limits and to prevent the landing of slaves from New Orleans. The petition noted that "some of the Negro Traders" had "adopted the horrible and inhuman practice of throwing the bodies of their Dead Negroes" into the city's swamps. As a result of the slaves' decomposition, the air was "loaded with obnoxious exhalations, at a time when the *cholera*, that King of Scourges, is lurking in our neighborhood."<sup>153</sup> Two days later the city council met in special session. The audience of several hundred was in a surly mood. Council member Felix Houston claimed he was "opposed to negro trading as a business being encouraged or permitted by the laws of the state" and claimed that it detracted from the city's "character and standing." Another council member, William Vannerson, demanded action. He recalled how "this desolating scourge" had previously been introduced "among us in several instances by the *traders* as they are called."<sup>154</sup> That evening the city council unanimously passed an ordinance expelling all traders from the city's center. It applied only to "those persons commonly called Negro Traders," with the fine set at ten dollars per day per slave.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Petitions, 22 Apr. 1833, Record Group Natchez, Reel 47, Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Emphasis in original.

<sup>154</sup> Natchez *Mississippi Journal and Natchez Advertiser*, 26 Apr. 1833. Emphasis in original.

<sup>155</sup> Minutes of the Selectmen, 22 Apr. 1833, Record Group Natchez, Reel 2, Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Apparently no specific action was taken against Franklin. He did, however, struggle to rebuild his reputation. When small pox struck the town one year later, many residents blamed him (James R. Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 2 Feb. 1834, Ballard Papers).



Even before the city council's action, seven of the town's slave traders had tried to restore their damaged reputations. They appeared before a Justice of the Peace and swore affidavits as to how many of their slaves, if any, died from disease.<sup>156</sup> Some of these speculators joined with other traders to differentiate themselves from Franklin by publishing an open letter in the local paper. In it they praised the conduct of the town's citizens and "out of the respect of the feelings of the people of Natchez" moved their slaves outside the city.<sup>157</sup> The speculators and the city council were merely completing the process begun four years before when the city council banned traders from the city's center between November 15 and April 15.<sup>158</sup> Apparently, the new ordinance was enforced. James R. Franklin grumbled that the "City Councill compells us all to leave the limits of the Coperation in two days. We shall have to take to the woods."<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Certificates of Negro Traders, 22 Apr. 1833, Record Group Natchez, Reel 36, Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Those traders who made such an oath were Samuel Bennett, Pierce Griffin, Paul Pascal, Lewis D. Collier, Samuel Wakefield, William Oldham, and Michael Hughes.

<sup>157</sup> *Natchez Mississippi Journal and Natchez Advertiser*, 26 Apr. 1833. Those traders who signed the letter were John W. Anderson, Samuel Wakefield, Lewis K. Grigsby, William Oldham, Thomas McCargo, Benjamin Hansford, R. A. Peuteur [Puryear], Samuel Bennett, John F. Harris, and Paul Pascal.

<sup>158</sup> Municipal Records, 9 June 1829; 26 Jan. 1830, Record Group Natchez, Reel 45, Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Traders were excluded from an area bounded by Fourth Street North, Fourth Street South, Seventh Street and the riverfront bluff. Traders who wanted to sell slaves had to keep them out of sight, not overcrowd the rooms, make sure none were diseased, and keep the facilities clean. The amended law may have been influenced by the petition of several traders (Municipal Records, 4 Nov. 1829, Record Group Natchez, Reel 47, Mississippi Department of Archives and History).

<sup>159</sup> James R. Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 24 Apr. 1833, Ballard Papers.

Where slave traders would not, or could not, regulate their own activities, the municipalities stepped in. At about the same time Natchez cracked down on speculators, New Orleans took similar steps. After “reiterated complaints” from citizens, the city council passed an ordinance prohibiting the exposition or sale of slaves in the city’s center. The council referred to the “thousands of slaves daily imported here from the North, and among whom very serious diseases have already broken out.”<sup>160</sup> When this law proved inadequate, the council banned “negro dealers” from housing their slaves within the incorporated city limits. Besides being notorious for disease, the slave depots were close to residences and lowered property values in the neighborhood.<sup>161</sup> Although passed in late November 1834, the law was only in place from January through April of 1835. Austin Woolfolk successfully presented a petition to the city council that allowed slave pens below Esplanade Street.<sup>162</sup> By 1840 the city had successfully negotiated a truce with the slave dealers. The council passed an ordinance requiring a license for slave depots and specified that such structures must be built of brick, be two stories high, and “kept constantly clean and properly ventilated.”

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<sup>160</sup> New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, 30 Mar. 1829, as quoted in *Western Luminary*, 3 June 1829, p. 377. The streets of Girod, Levee, Esplanade, and Treme bounded the area, which was roughly composed of the French Quarter and the central business district. In 1831, the city council mandated that all slaves entering the city must be registered with the mayor’s office within twenty-four hours of arrival. The law was presumably intended to keep a closer reign on the activities of slave traders (New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, 22 Oct. 1831).

<sup>161</sup> *A Digest of the Ordinances, Resolutions, By-laws and Regulations of the Corporation of New-Orleans, and a Collection of the Laws of the Legislature relative to the said City* (New Orleans, 1836), pp. 139-41.

<sup>162</sup> *Digest of Ordinances*, p. 141; New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, 7 Apr. 1835.

Additionally, if an infectious disease broke out in such a place, the speculator must notify the mayor within twenty-four hours.<sup>163</sup>

Even though such laws might have been burdensome to traders, the prospect of facing epidemics was even worse. Obviously the death of slaves was a loss on their investment. Franklin was in no mood to hear the complaints of one of his business associates. Losing two slaves “makes me laugh to hear of a man being in distress.” Franklin pointed out he had forty or fifty sick and had lost four in forty-eight hours. He feared that the only way he could do business “next season” would be to purchase sparingly at reduced prices.<sup>164</sup> If linked to disease, speculators would have a difficult time drumming up business. Competition for purchasers was intense during epidemics because buyers were scarce. Traders knew that it was in their best interest to take the necessary steps to ensure that their slaves were healthy, or at least distance their operations from sickly slaves. One speculator felt the pinch when a small pox epidemic broke out in Natchez amongst the imported slaves. He told his wife that the “shocking disease” crippled his business because it “prevented the country people from coming in town” to buy bondservants. It forced him to vaccinate his slaves and move them to the country in the hopes of preventing them from becoming infected.<sup>165</sup> Franklin’s brother,

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<sup>163</sup> *A Digest of the Ordinances and Resolutions of the General Council of the City of New-Orleans* (New Orleans, 1845), p. 28.

<sup>164</sup> Isaac Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 30 Mar. 1834, Ballard Papers.

<sup>165</sup> Alfred Royal Wynne to Almire Wynne, 8 Mar. 1831, Wynne Family Papers, Box 18, Folder 1, Tennessee State Library and Archives. For more evidence that it was difficult to sell slaves during epidemics, see James R. Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 14 Nov. 1833, Ballard Papers.

James, complained that he could not sell any slaves, as times were “dreadful.” It took all of the time and the effort of the healthy slaves to care for those who were sick. The result was a depressing situation. During a Natchez epidemic, he whined, “I never wanted to leave any place so bad as I do want to leave this damn hole.”<sup>166</sup>

The threat of disease was a practical reason why residents of states that imported slaves felt uneasy or resentful of the interstate slave trade. There was another explanation why those in the Deep South felt ambivalent about the trade—there was a genuine, although shallow and scattered, concern for the consequences of the trade upon the slave. Speculation obviously had harmful effects upon slaves, who were dragged from their homes and families, and this forced deportation could be bothersome. At least before 1830 a significant number of Deep South citizens could relate to the charge that the speculator was a “pitiless wretch, who has not the spirit or pride to pursue a more honorable calling.”<sup>167</sup> Like the international trade, the interstate trade was piracy and objectionable to “every honorable principle of nature.”<sup>168</sup> Governor William Rabun of Georgia railed against the “abominable traffic” in slaves that was becoming “every

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<sup>166</sup> James R. Franklin to Rice C. Ballard, 7 May (first quotation), 14 Nov. 1833, 2 Feb. 1834 (second quotation), Ballard Papers. Slave jails in the Upper South also suffered from the association with disease. They appear to have been healthier because of the climate and the shorter period of time bondservants spent in the facilities (Andrew Durnford to John McDonogh, 25 June 1835, McDonogh Papers; *Richmond Enquirer*, 16 Sept. 1834; Sturge, *Visit to the United States*, p. 31; Abdy, *Journal of a Residence*, 2: 179).

<sup>167</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 4 Dec. 1816.

<sup>168</sup> Augusta *Georgia Courier*, 19 June 1826, as quoted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 15 July 1826, p. 364. There was limited sentiment that the trade “destroys all the sensibilities of the white” population (Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 4 Dec. 1821).

day more common.”<sup>169</sup> In the end, reasoned one Georgia resident, dispensing with abstractions and scholastic jargon will lead to the conclusion that “the trade is morally wrong.”<sup>170</sup> The governor of South Carolina, David R. Williams, called the trade “remorseless” and “merciless.” It was a “reproach to our morals, and an outrage to our feelings.” He wanted the roads of his state free from the sight of slaves “constantly dragged through them, to minister to insatiable avarice.”<sup>171</sup> James G. Birney led the drive to keep slave traders out of Alabama. A slaveholder, Birney began to take an interest in the American Colonization Society in 1826. He recognized how the internal slave trade undermined the principles of the A.C.S., so when he went to Montgomery, he brought with him the rough draft of the bill that eventually passed. After easy passage of the law, Birney observed that it did not please the large slaveholders who wanted unlimited access to buying slaves. It did please those who were concerned with the growth of the state’s slave population and “those who despised slavetraders.”<sup>172</sup> Such attitudes, though, were never widespread in the Deep South, especially after the mid 1820s. Residents there never had the depth or breadth of disgust for the trade that was common in the Upper South. Perhaps it was easier to justify the purchase of slaves rather than their sale. After all, the slave owner who purchased more bondservants

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<sup>169</sup> *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia* (Milledgeville, 1818), p. 8 (quotation); *Milledgeville Georgia Journal*, 3 Nov. 1818; Scarborough, *Opposition to Slavery*, p. 115-16.

<sup>170</sup> *Milledgeville Georgia Journal*, 29 Sept. 1818.

<sup>171</sup> *Charleston Courier*, 4 Dec. 1816. See also the statement of Mississippi Governor Holmes (*Natchez Mississippi State Gazette*, 1 Mar. 1818).

<sup>172</sup> Birney, *James G. Birney*, pp. 56, 57 (quotation).

could argue that he was fulfilling his duty to the slaves. Instead of abandoning them at a sale, he was adopting them into his household.

More importantly, the states of the Deep South tolerated and ultimately embraced the interstate slave trade because they had no other choice. Their continued expansion and vitality depended on a fresh supply of bondservants. Speculators saw the need and worked vigorously to meet it. Their efforts, however, were not always looked upon with favor. Citizens of the Deep South, groping for easy answers to a complex situation, lashed out at speculators for causing problems of their own doing. They did not want to face the fact that they were to blame for the currency drain and the rapid growth of the slave population. Epidemics, moreover, defied any rational explanation, but it was convenient to blame speculators for importing sick slaves. Traders gained a reputation for shady business dealings. The pronouncements against the trade and the traders reflect southern fears. Striking at the interstate trade was a means of defusing the tensions of slavery. Instead of taking definite action to limit the growth of the slave population, southerners used ceremonial solutions against speculators. The Deep South's inability and unwillingness to deal forthrightly with the interstate slave trade led to distorted perceptions of speculation. Citizens were increasingly willing to rely on a simple stereotype of traders rather than look realistically at the trade's consequences. Eventually these attitudes spread to the Upper South as it came to embrace the interstate trade and alleviated its qualms about speculation in slaves.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> The attitudes came full circle in the 1850s during the agitation to reopen the African trade (Takaki, *Pro-Slavery Crusade*).



A TROUBLESOME COMMERCE:  
THE INTERSTATE SLAVE TRADE, 1808-1840

VOLUME II

A Dissertation

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in

The Department of History

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## Chapter Five

John Hartwell Cocke was a prosperous slaveholder in Fluvanna County, Virginia, who owned Bremo Plantation. When thinking about slavery, Cocke's mind could not find rest. He considered the institution to be a "curse upon our Land."<sup>1</sup> It is not that he feared a rebellion or thought that slavery inefficiently allocated labor. Instead, Cocke wrestled with the moral dimensions of the institution. He understood his dependence on slavery even while reluctantly admitting that it clashed with his Christian faith. Cocke and his wife Louisa were evangelical Protestants who had difficulty reconciling the teachings of the New Testament with the ownership of human beings. They thought slavery was a corrosive agent that undermined the basis of good society since it ran counter to the development of Christian character in both whites and blacks. Instead of sitting by idly, the Cockes worked to ameliorate slavery where they could even while entertaining ideas that someday the institution would be abolished.

John Cocke hoped ultimately to emancipate his slaves and send them to Liberia, but doing so required much preparation. He believed that only the "confidential domesticks or mechanicks" were "sufficiently enlightened to make liberty either useful to themselves, or beneficial to any free community." The others, who formed a "separate Caste," must be readied for emancipation, especially since God would one day remove slavery. Cocke arranged for local artisans to instruct his slaves in the

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<sup>1</sup> Unsigned, undirected letter of John Hartwell Cocke, Sr., Dec. 1833, Cocke Family Papers, University of Virginia.

mechanical trades and hired northern women as tutors to teach reading and writing.

While John concentrated on the practical aspects of the slaves' education, Louisa saw to the spiritual component. She taught Bible classes to their bondservants and oversaw their Christian education. Not only would the slaves be productive when freed, but they would also be virtuous. The Cockes used Bremon as a training ground for freedom.<sup>2</sup>

Emancipation must be carefully planned and gradually implemented. John Cocke believed that colonization was the only viable alternative. He could not envision ex-slaves living harmoniously next to their former masters, so an African colony seemed like a providential idea. Like many other enthusiasts of colonization, Cocke did not rigorously apply logic to his schemes and believed the government could fund the endeavor with its surplus revenue. With the weight of God and government on its side, colonization was the perfect answer, and Cocke could not understand why any slaveholder would not support the idea. He wrote that once colonization secured adequate funding, the slaves "would as naturally be carried away as water flows down to the Ocean."<sup>3</sup> While colonization might be irresistible to the slaveholder, Cocke recognized that not all slaves would consent to the scheme. Deportation to Africa would sever family ties, hence another reason for the slow preparation of bondservants. Given

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<sup>2</sup> Undirected letter of John Hartwell Cocke, 23 Sept. 1831, Cocke Family Papers (quotations); Louis B. Gimelli, "Louisa Maxwell Cocke: An Evangelical Plantation Mistress in the Antebellum South," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 9 (1989): 53-71; Martin Boyd Coyner, "John Hartwell Cocke of Bremon: Agriculture and Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Virginia, 1961. That the Cockes arranged for their slaves to learn reading and writing was unusual and illegal.

<sup>3</sup> Undirected letter of John Hartwell Cocke, Sr., 23 Sept. 1831, Cocke Family Papers.

enough time, slaves would eventually recognize the benefits of colonization and agree to it. Even though John Cocke was too sanguine about colonization's ability to rid the land of slavery, he and wife were typical of evangelical Christian slaveholders. The Cockes and others like them were, in essence, trying to break through what they saw as the grime of slavery and recast their slaves as copies of themselves. Slaves must be rescued from the intellectual and moral retardation imposed by the peculiar institution. At the same time, they must be sheltered from the withering effects of slavery's worst abuses.

Even as the Cockes had a condescending view of their slaves, they also recognized the essential humanity of the bondservants and endeavored to treat them in accordance with Biblical principles. They were sensitive to the destruction of slave families, as evidenced by their attitudes towards the slave trade. Both husband and wife saw the trade as one of the worst consequences of slavery because it destroyed the basic spiritual unit of society, the family. Without a stable slave community, the Cockes felt they could not adequately train their people. Moral development began in the home and a ravaged family unit was a poor foundation for Christian growth. Selling slaves indiscriminately also set a bad example on the plantation and undermined the Cockes' efforts to model spiritual values for their bondservants. John explained to a friend that the "deep depravity of the slave trade" ran counter to his faith. He not only disagreed with speculation, but took active steps to counteract it. Cocke intervened during the sale of his brother-in-law's slaves and arranged the transaction through a commission merchant rather than a speculator. When Cocke's brother-in-law complained of his low profit, the commission merchant testily responded that it was the best possible price

unless the slaves were sold to traders. In this case, Cocke prevailed upon his brother-in-law to accept a lower price in order to prevent the slaves from falling into a trader's clutches. He recognized the necessity of sale but wanted to blunt its impact as much as possible.<sup>4</sup>

Cocke also tried to shield his own slaves from the trade. His humanitarian principle was bounded by the smooth operation of Bremon. When faced with dissension or sale, Cocke chose the latter but still spared his slaves from the most harmful effects of speculation. The continued disobedience of a few slaves led Cocke to sell them lest the rest of his workforce catch the contagion of impudence. He sold bondservants to close friends whom he knew well and would treat them properly.<sup>5</sup> Louisa hated such occasions. She confided to her diary that she was "a good deal disturbed of late on the occasion of my husband's having to sell some of the color'd people to Alabama for bad conduct."<sup>6</sup> Louisa understood the deep pain associated with the slave trade and worked to protect her slaves from it. On more than one occasion she was unsuccessful, showing that the principles of faith had their limits and even those owners with good intentions could not always act upon their scruples. For John Cocke, there was no question that speculation in slaves was wrong. He understood the agony of sale for his slaves and

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<sup>4</sup> John H. Cocke to Ralph Gurley, 31 Mar. 1833, American Colonization Society Papers, Library of Congress, as quoted in Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832* (Baton Rouge, 1982), p. 224 (quotation); Bernard Peyton to John Hartwell Cocke, 20 Feb. 1828, Cocke Family Papers.

<sup>5</sup> Coyner, "John Hartwell Cocke," p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> Louisa Cocke Diary, 16 Jan. 1824, Cocke Family Papers.

took active steps to prevent such pain. Cocke believed in the essential dignity of his slaves, noting that slavery caused them to “sink” and ignorance kept them hobbled.<sup>7</sup> He did sell his slaves on occasion, but not for profit or gain. Instead he sold his bondservants out of necessity, in order to maintain strict discipline on his plantation, and sacrificed money in the process. No doubt Cocke could have gotten a better price had he dealt with a speculator, but he put his slaves’ feelings ahead of his desire for extra cash.

The Cockes’ attitudes towards slavery and the slave trade were animated by their Christian faith. John Cocke considered American plantations to be the most fertile ground for missionaries. Christian doctrine was necessary to correct the wrongs among the “domestic heathen” in the middle and southern states.<sup>8</sup> He was unlike most of his fellow slave owners in that he made an essential distinction between slavery and the slave. It was the institution of slavery that degraded the slaves, and, ultimately, whites as well. Others pointed to bondservants themselves as the trouble, essentially believing that Africans were destined to be slaves and that slavery itself was something that must be tolerated and protected. Cocke’s thinking was unusual for his day, and led him to believe that owners should not treat their slaves as beasts of burden and callously sell them for gain. For evangelical Christians like Cocke, it was the unbridled commerce in slaves that caused much discomfort. The interstate slave trade epitomized this blatant disregard for the basic dignity of the slave. But as Cocke’s situation demonstrates, the

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<sup>7</sup> Unsigned, undirected letter of John Hartwell Cocke, Sr., Dec. 1833, Cocke Family Papers.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

line between selling slaves for disciplinary reasons and selling them for gain was often blurred. While Cocke could claim he wrestled with his conscience, he doubtless made money from the sale of his malefactors. To those outside the plantation, it probably mattered little why Cocke sold the slaves, since many felt one reason was as good as the next. Most importantly, the results for the slaves were the same no matter which explanation Cocke used to justify his actions. The slaves were separated from their family just as they would have been had Cocke been deliberately dabbling in the slave market. Evangelical Christians, while they might find fault with speculation, often ended up participating in the very thing they abhorred. They found their situation exacerbated by the fact that they could find no effective remedy for what they saw as a deadly poison.

Southern evangelical churches and individual Christians struggled with the slave trade. A grudging acceptance of slavery in the eighteenth century grew into specific denunciations of slave trading. Congregations disciplined members who took part in speculation in order to purify the church. Most of the qualms about the trade dealt with violations of Christ's teaching or the fear that speculation in slaves would corrupt the master by encouraging him to pursue riches rather than holiness. Until about 1830, southern evangelical religion was an effective force that shielded the slave from the master's excesses. The situation changed, however, as the churches began to actively defend slavery. Denunciations of the trade's injustice gave way to an emphasis on slavery's goodness no matter the consequences for the slave. Masters' authority over their bondservants approached an absolute right that should not be interfered with or questioned.

Evangelicals' fundamental distaste for the interstate slave trade stemmed from an equivocal attitude towards slavery and concern over the effects of speculation. In the eighteenth century, the southern evangelical denominations—Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist—were not fully committed to slavery, and even questioned the efficacy of the institution. In the main, they ascribed to the belief that slavery, while not clearly a sin, could easily start the believer on the road to destruction. It could cause whites to become overly concerned about money at the expense of their spiritual affairs while making them grow callous toward the suffering of individuals. Thoughtful slave owners knew that as slavery exploited blacks and destroyed their family lives, it could also undermine the morals of whites. There was a vague sentiment amongst evangelicals to either free the slaves or ameliorate their condition, and there was moderate support for prohibiting ministers from owning bondservants. Evangelicals tended to criticize slavery in the abstract, point out its evils, and emphasize that slaves were persons precious to God. There was, though, no concerted or determined effort by the evangelical denominations to destroy the peculiar institution. Those who harbored an aversion to slavery assumed that it would die naturally and did not want to take drastic action lest they cause too much social disruption. Revolutionary rhetoric about freedom, furthermore, combined with the powerful message of the New Testament to ensure that slavery was not universally accepted by Christians as a beneficial institution.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago, 1977), pp. 66-69; John B. Boles, "Introduction," in John B. Boles, ed., *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South 1740-1870* (Lexington, Ken., 1988),

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the Bible was open to interpretation regarding slavery. It could be used to defend or attack servitude. Paul the apostle addressed the issue of a slave who had run away in his letter to Philemon and directed the slave return to his owner as a sign of good faith. Many could, and did, use this passage and others to put the Bible to use in justifying slavery and protecting it from the attacks of those who sought to abolish the institution. Most clergy in the South accepted the fact that slavery was not going anywhere. They separated its civil aspects from their moral leadership. Their congregations followed suit, believing the church should not try to destroy slavery but should instead enforce the commandments of the Bible as they impacted upon slavery. Most Christians believed in the utility of slavery to keep the races separate and as a means of social organization. While slavery was not uniformly positive in their eyes, it was necessary. Parts of the Bible, though, were put to use by those who opposed slavery. The operation of the golden rule, teaching to do unto others as you would have them do unto you, could undermine the basis of a slave society. Few people would willingly consent to slavery. Even if the Bible justified slavery, the golden rule militated against a harsh treatment of slaves. Most Christians assumed masters had a duty to treat their slaves with more than a modicum of decency lest they face heavenly sanction.<sup>10</sup>

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pp. 8-9; James D. Essig, *The Bonds of Wickedness: American Evangelicals against Slavery, 1770-1808* (Philadelphia, 1982), pp. 26-52.

<sup>10</sup> Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1865* (Baton Rouge, 1980), pp. 206-9.



Each evangelical denomination dealt differently with slavery. The Baptists of the eighteenth century officially condemned it as a “moral evil” and cautioned members about its ill-effects. They took no effective steps, however, to ensure its demise within the denomination. At a time when the interstate trade was of minor significance, especially in comparison to the African trade, the Baptists left it up to the local churches to take their own steps to stamp out commerce in slaves. A 1793 report of the Virginia Baptist General Committee seems to be typical of the attitude amongst many Baptist churches. It described slavery as neither a moral nor a religious issue and thus not a legitimate topic of discussion. Slavery, the conference decided, was firmly established in the country and was a purely political matter addressed in the political realm. The church, in other words, should not become entangled in the issue.<sup>11</sup> Like the Baptists, the Presbyterians made tepid moves against slavery. In 1787 the ruling synod of Presbyterianism, fearing that slaves might be dangerous to the community, recommended that church members prepare their slaves for freedom and take steps to bring about abolition. There was no mention of the church’s stance regarding the sale of bondservants. In 1818 the Presbyterian General Assembly used even stronger language to condemn slavery itself, calling it a “gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature...utterly inconsistent with the law of God.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, *In His Image, but...*, pp. 47-55; Alice D. Adams, *The Neglected Period of Anti-Slavery in America* (Boston, 1908) p. 100; W. Harrison Daniel, “Virginia Baptists and the Negro in the Antebellum Era,” *Journal of Negro History*, 56 (1971): 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Religious Intelligencer*, 27 June 1818, p. 58 (quotation); *Niles’ Weekly Register*, supplement to vol. xvi, (1819), pp. 153-55; Smith, *In His Image, but...*, pp. 55-58.

Unlike the other two denominations, the Methodists took action in the eighteenth century to deal with slavery within the church. The denomination that would become the biggest in the antebellum South proclaimed in 1784 that it should find some method to “extirpate this abomination from among us.” It voted to expel members who did not take steps to emancipate their slaves within a year, although individuals who lived in states that did not allow manumission were exempt from the rule. Delegates also decided to banish members who bought or sold slaves, except to liberate them. Although not specifically noted, the rule applied to both the foreign and domestic slave trades, although it appears to be intended more for the importation of Africans. The African trade was the most important source of new slaves, and if the church could prevent its members from acquiring new slaves, then it was more likely to eliminate bondage. These rules, though, were so unpopular they were suspended the next year. Five years later the church asked members as a “general rule” to refrain from “buying or selling the bodies and souls of men, women, and children, with an intention to enslave them.”<sup>13</sup> In 1796 the General Conference voted to permit slaveholders to join the church and allowed members to buy slaves as long as they notified their local church. A committee would then determine the number of years the slave had to work

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<sup>13</sup> Lewis M. Purifoy, “The Methodist Anti-Slavery Tradition, 1784-1844,” *Methodist History*, 4 (1966): 3-16 (quotations on p. 4); Smith, *In His Image, but...*, pp. 38-47; Arthur Dickens Thomas, Jr., “The Second Great Awakening and Slavery Reform, 1785-1837,” Unpublished Th.D. Dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, pp. 78-79; Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton, 1965), pp. 69-70. Over one-third of the churches in what would become the Confederacy were Methodist in 1860 (James M. Buckley, *Constitutional and Parliamentary History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1912), pp. 249-50).

before paying off his or her purchase price. Methodists could not, however, sell slaves, presumably to protect all parties involved from the ravages of the trade. The general intent was to stop the spread of slavery within the Methodist denomination and ultimately render it extinct, although such an outcome was highly unlikely. The net result was a compromise with slavery even as the Methodists desired to eliminate the abuses associated with the indiscriminate sale of slaves. Methodists continued to struggle with the commerce in slaves, as the 1804 General Conference exempted members from Georgia and the Carolinas from the rule regarding the purchase and sale of slaves. These three states were the primary areas for the importation of Africans, so their exemption made the rule virtually useless. By the time the African trade was outlawed in 1808, the individual conferences were allowed to set their own rules regarding speculation, but conferences in those states that imported the bulk of the slaves did not bar members from buying or selling slaves. The Methodist church stopped trying to regulate the trade and concentrated its efforts on the moral suasion of its members.<sup>14</sup>

Part of the reason for the softening of the Methodists' stance, and that of the other denominations as well, was the spread of the plantation system throughout the South. The churches competed for membership and one way to attract potential members who owned slaves was to remain silent on the issue. Resistance to slavery moved out of the official church debates and into local congregations and individual consciences. Southern churches no longer offered any effective resistance to slavery.

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<sup>14</sup> Emory S. Bucke, ed., *The History of American Methodism*, 2 vol. (New York, 1964), 2: 13; Lucius C. Matlack, *History of American Slavery*, (1849), pp. 31-34.

Most of the anti-slavery clergy left the South because their views increasingly came in conflict with the opinions of their members, and their departure made it even more difficult for the churches to mount any effective resistance to slavery. The only true opposition to the peculiar institution remained in the Upper South, where there was less dependence on slave labor.<sup>15</sup>

The growth of slaveholding congregants led to a reexamination of the church's relationship to slavery. Churches that wanted to attract converts were willing to soften their anti-slavery stance, while the increase in slaveholding members meant that they could effectively lobby for change within the organization. The evangelical churches came to recognize that overthrowing the social order by abolishing slavery was foolhardy, so antislavery members tried to blunt the harsh impact of the peculiar institution. In this fashion, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians wanted to influence the behavior of individual slaveholders rather than make sweeping changes in their society. These denominations hoped to persuade masters to reconsider the treatment of their slaves, especially living arrangements, housing, food, punishment, religious instruction, and the threat of sale. Using scripture as a guide for action would "promote the moral welfare of the whole plantation." Christian faith could then be used to bolster slavery by reforming its abuses. Such efforts, though, needed the cooperation of slave owners, and their commitment varied. Some wanted no interference in their affairs.

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<sup>15</sup> Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York, 1997), pp. 92-95, 155; Smith, *In His Image, but...*, pp. 69-76; Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, p. 110. The disaffected clergy tended to move to Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Those southerners who remained opposed to slavery tended to join and dominate anti-slavery organizations, which were mainly confined to the Upper South (Smith, *In His Image, but...*, p. 70; Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, pp. 75-79).

Those owners who seriously believed in the tenets of spiritual dominion over their slaves, however, saw the institution as beneficial to the bondservants because it provided them with an introduction to civilization. The slave quarter was potentially a mission field for the master.<sup>16</sup>

Even though slavery could be justified as a type of moral guardianship, there were still doubts amongst evangelicals about how, why, and when their stewardship would end. The peculiar institution was, it seemed, necessary for racial control and continued southern economic development. Any talk of emancipation played upon white fears of a race war, and the property rights of slaveholders were firmly entrenched. Still, evangelicals of the early nineteenth century could not bring themselves to an unquestioning acceptance of the perpetual nature of slavery. In 1816 the Methodist General Conference threw up its hands and concluded that “little can be done to abolish the practice so contrary to the principles of moral justice.” Two years later the Presbyterian General Assembly took much the same position. It declared slavery to be a moral dilemma, but judged emancipation to be even worse, believing it to be socially disruptive. The Presbyterians denounced the notion of “immediate and universal emancipation.” Sudden freedom for slaves, who were mired in “ignorance

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<sup>16</sup> Betram Wyatt-Brown, “Modernizing Southern Slavery: The Proslavery Argument Reinterpreted,” in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York, 1982), p. 34 (quotation); Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, p. 75; Randy J. Sparks, “Mississippi’s Apostle of Slavery: James Smylie and the Biblical Defense of Slavery,” *Journal of Mississippi History*, 51 (1989): 96; Oakes, *Ruling Race*, pp. 96-100; Joyce E. Chaplin, “Slavery and the Principle of Humanity: A Modern Idea in the Early Lower South,” *Journal of Social History*, 24 (1990): 299; Rose, “Domestication of Domestic Slavery,” pp. 18-36; Kenneth Moore Startup, *The Root of All Evil: The Protestant Clergy and the Economic Mind of the South* (Athens, 1997), pp. 69-74.

and vicious habits,” would impair the “safety and happiness of the master and the slave.” The best course of action, the Assembly felt, was for slave owners to patronize the American Colonization Society, and provide religious instruction for their slaves.<sup>17</sup>

John Jones, who eventually became a Methodist minister, was an evangelical who struggled with slavery. Before accepting the call to the ministry, Jones felt it was good to own slaves. After his conversion, he came to hate slavery and thought that most of his fellow evangelicals saw it as a “great social, political, and moral evil.” Like his fellow churchgoers, Jones endured slavery for the present but looked to the day when it would ultimately be extinguished. The attitude of evangelicals like Jones who hoped for slavery’s eventual end but took no decisive steps to bring it about was typical. Their rhetoric was concerned with fixing their eyes on the heavenly kingdom rather than on earthly affairs. As a result, they were more likely to tolerate the evil of slavery and work to lessen the harsh impact of the peculiar institution. Instead of trying to reshape society to fit their conception of Christianity, they did the reverse. They modified their faith to fit peculiar aspects of their situation. Evangelicals tried to make the more objectionable features of their society less problematic for Christians, and even those who did not believe. The churches tended to accommodate the social system rather than change it. It was their sense of moral stewardship and their belief that they could reform slaveholders that led them to accept what many regarded as sin.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Religious Intelligencer*, 27 June 1818, p. 59 (quotations); *Niles' Weekly Register*, supplement to vol. xvi, (1819), pp. 153-55.

<sup>18</sup> John Jones, as quoted in Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens, 1994), p. 67 (quotation); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New

Even as the plantation system spread and slaveholders filled the church pews, the Second Great Awakening swept through the South and gave impetus to the growth of the evangelical churches.<sup>19</sup> Converts flocked to the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches in record numbers. By 1850 these three denominations had grown to such an extent that they composed over nine-tenths of the churches in the South, with a membership of about one-seventh of the population. Affiliation was only part of their influence, since ministers regularly preached to congregations up to four times the size of the enrolled membership. The evangelical denominations, then, had widespread power in the South at a time when church attendance was a customary feature of life. Most slave owners in the South belonged, at least nominally, to one of the evangelical denominations.<sup>20</sup> Even while the hierarchical nature of southern society tended to reproduce itself within the church, there still was an undercurrent of egalitarianism. All white people, whether they owned slaves or not, could join the church provided they made the necessary declaration of faith, although not all men would have the same amount of influence once inside its doors. Much of the early nineteenth century preaching stressed the equality of man before God, in that all people were sinners

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York, 1978), pp. 186-87. For an account of how Jones agonized, and ultimately accepted slaveholding, see John G. Jones Journal, 7 Apr. 1833 and 7 Apr. 1836, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

<sup>19</sup> John B. Boles, *The Great Revival 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington, Ken., 1972).

<sup>20</sup> C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, Geo., 1985), pp. 54-57; Oakes, *Ruling Race*, pp. 96-100. Heyrman estimates that by 1830 evangelicals made up less than half of the southern population (Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, p. 5).

regardless of station in life. This leveling influence, combined with the democratic structure of the expanding churches, tended to attract the poorer segments of the population, especially non-slaveholders. The egalitarian current of evangelicalism operated against the idea of racial inequality and allowed African-Americans to join white churches. In Mississippi, for example, evangelical churches routinely baptized African-Americans and gave them the right hand of Christian fellowship, but also made sure they sat in their own section in the back of the church. Baptists, in particular, sought out blacks for church membership. In Virginia, black and white Baptists worshipped together throughout the eighteenth century and up until 1860. The criteria for membership were the same for both races, as were the disciplinary rules, although slaves might suffer church discipline for running away from their master or for being disobedient. Blacks could legally preach to congregations until 1832, when the outburst of legislation following the Nat Turner rebellion prohibited black preachers. Although practices varied widely, slaves commonly participated in the church life of the evangelical denominations in the South. Social interaction did not lead to social equity, and whites controlled the power structure of the churches.<sup>21</sup>

The presence of African-American members, however, had some influence in keeping alive an anti-slavery sentiment in the evangelical churches. While the majority of southerners who were opposed to the peculiar institution were animated by their

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<sup>21</sup> Sparks, *Jordan's Stormy Banks*, p. 60; Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, pp. 66-69; Boles, "Introduction," pp. 8-12; W. Harrison Daniel, "Virginia Baptists and the Negro in the Early Republic," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 80 (1972): 60-62; Daniel, "Virginia Baptists in the Antebellum Era," pp. 1-7; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, pp. 101-2.



religious beliefs, they tended to organize their efforts through a colonization society rather than directly confront slavery. Evangelicals who were uncomfortable with slavery thought, or wished, it would someday end. They had no idea how such an event would come to pass and colonization became a comforting way to push off the problem for another day. This inchoate opposition to slavery led to a tendency within the evangelical denominations to criticize slavery in the abstract and delineate the duties of both master and slave. Evangelical ministers reiterated that slaves were persons who were precious to God, thus giving slaveholders a religious obligations to their bondservants. These churches did not take the radical step of condemning slavery as a sin, but they did put the slaves on the same level as their owners in one important respect: their relation to God. In theory, then, the deeply devout slaveholder was no better in God's eyes than one of his slaves.<sup>22</sup>

The presence of African-American members was a visible reminder that early church doctrine emphasized slaves as being persons precious to God. This idea created burdens for masters who assumed the role of moral guardian for their bondservants. The Virginia Conference of the Methodist church ordered owners to instruct their slaves in the "principles and duties of religion."<sup>23</sup> Teaching slaves to read and right was illegal in the southern states, but earnest masters assumed responsibility for their slaves' religious instruction or delegated it to their wives or a trusted slave preacher. Reflective owners extended their efforts into the moral lives of their slaves. They tried to improve

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<sup>22</sup> Boles, "Introduction," pp. 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> William W. Sweet, *Virginia Methodism: A History* (Richmond, 1955), p. 200.

the living conditions in the quarters. Other owners raised money for the American Colonization Society or sent their slaves to Africa. The idea of guardianship was extended to include almost any aspect of a slave's life and gave masters an excuse to meddle wherever they pleased.

Of particular concern for masters who presumed the mantle of trusteeship was discipline, punishment, and sale. Evangelical religion, when viewed in this way, provided principles that were subversive to the complete authority of the master over his slaves. Those who owned other human beings, after all, would eventually be accountable to their heavenly master.<sup>24</sup> The prospect of a divine judgment could persuade owners to reconsider harsh treatment of slaves. This idea was especially noticeable when the slave was a Christian. Presbyterians went further than the other two evangelical denominations in protecting slaves who belonged to the church. In 1822 the Presbyterian General Assembly used strong language to prevent a master from selling a slave "who is also in communion and good standing with our church, contrary to his or her will." The offender should be suspended from church membership "till he repent, and make all reparation in his power to the injured party."<sup>25</sup> The Hanover, Virginia, Presbytery reaffirmed the stance of the national church when it mandated that

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<sup>24</sup> John G. West, Jr., *The Politics of Revelation and Reason: Religion and Civic Life in the New Nation* (Lawrence, Kan., 1996), p. 82; Barbara Layenette Green, "The Slavery Debate in Missouri, 1831-1855," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Missouri, Columbia, 1980, pp. 110-11; Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, pp. 97-100; Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, pp. 28-30, 40-41, 68-71.

<sup>25</sup> *Abolition Intelligencer and Missionary Magazine*, July 1822, p. 36 (quotations); *Religious Remembrancer*, 20 June 1818, p. 171; *Religious Intelligencer*, 27 June 1818, p. 60.

any of its members who sold a slave who was also a church member should be disciplined until they repented.<sup>26</sup> Here the church denounced the slave trade in general and, amazingly, extended special protection to slaves who were members of a local congregation. Insulating a slave from sale was virtually unthinkable and a serious erosion of the rights which slaveholders presumed. Bondservants who converted and then joined the church would have special status that limited masters' abilities to attend to their affairs.

A widow who lived in Tennessee ran into just such a problem. She planned to move to Alabama, but had to make arrangements for her slaves. The woman, who belonged to a Presbyterian church, wanted to sell a female slave and her two children. The slave's husband, who lived in the same city, had a different owner. When the woman applied for a certificate of good standing from the church in order to be admitted to another Presbyterian congregation in Alabama, she was denied. Since the slaves were members of her church, the elders felt it wrong to grant the request unless she made arrangements not to separate the woman and the children from the father. The husband's owner made a reasonable offer for the three slaves, but the widow refused. She then sold the female slave to a "most wicked man" and moved to Alabama with the children. The woman was "of course" suspended from the church.<sup>27</sup> While this episode demonstrates that evangelical churches took action against speculation, it also shows

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas, "Second Great Awakening," p. 148. The church, of course, risked attracting a flood of slave converts once news leaked out about the privilege. There is no evidence to suggest that such a thing happened.

<sup>27</sup> Undated *Maryville Trumpeter*, as reprinted in the *Liberator*, 9 May 1835, p. 73.

that church discipline was ineffective for those members who did not feel compelled to remain in good standing. They chose personal autonomy over group affiliation.

Even though the Presbyterian church was the only one specifically to bar its members from selling one another, other evangelicals felt much the same. Frederick Douglass observed how there was a “scandal connected with the idea of one Christian selling another to the Georgia traders.”<sup>28</sup> An evangelical minister from Prince George, Maryland, was particularly troubled by what transpired when he was out of town. Ned, a “very reputable black communicant,” frequently attended prayer meetings. Ned’s “hard-hearted” master flogged him for his diligence. When a “Georgia buyer” came through the neighborhood, the master sold Ned. The minister could not comprehend the action, especially since it came on the “*Holy Sabbath*.” Ned did not complain when the irons were riveted on his wrists, but cried and said, “Jesus suffered more.” The minister implored his fellow Christians to come to their senses and look at the treatment of slaves. He wondered, “Is there not a thunder-bolt of wrath, reddening and threatening to smite a Christian nation, that dares still to traffic in the ‘souls of men?’” The minister probably had qualms about slavery before the incident with Ned, but the callous sale of Ned for acting upon his Christian beliefs sent him firmly into the anti-slavery camp.<sup>29</sup>

Most southern clergy, though, supported slavery even if they opposed the interstate slave trade. Jeremiah Jeter, a Presbyterian minister and slave owner in eastern Virginia, wondered what to do with his slaves. He wanted to be rid of his bondservants,

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<sup>28</sup> Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855; reprint, New York, 1968), p. 302.

<sup>29</sup> *Religious Remembrancer*, 26 Oct. 1816, pp. 33-34. Emphasis in original.

but the laws of Virginia forbade emancipation. None of his slaves wanted to go to Liberia and he was not willing to force them into exile. The best course of action, he decided, was to “sell them or give them away.” Again, the slaves protested and Jeter did not carry out his scheme. Failing to dispose of his bondservants, Jeter concluded it was his “solemn obligation” to keep them and be a conscientious master. He justified his inaction by arguing that free blacks were usually worse off than whites. Although Jeter’s writing may be an exercise in self-justification, he seemed to be truly troubled with slavery. His preaching reflected his sense of personal confusion. Instead of emphasizing the goodness of slavery or illuminating whites on the scriptural basis of the institution, he stressed the responsibility of masters to their slaves. Jeter thought that the “prevalent opinion” of the 1820s was that slavery “imposed great responsibilities, and was fraught with many evils, economical, social, political, and moral,” a statement that perfectly captured his own attitude. Most people, he thought, felt that slavery should be abolished as soon as possible. Jeter himself harbored a slight hope that eventually slavery would be peaceably removed.<sup>30</sup>

Divided minds like Jeter’s were not unusual for the time since most evangelicals had a conditional acceptance of slavery. Even though they tolerated the presence of the peculiar institution, they could not abandon the vague idea that it was, somehow, wrong and needed to be reformed, controlled, and eventually eliminated. They tried to make the system of slavery itself seem moral by ameliorating the blatant violations of God’s

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<sup>30</sup> Jeter, *Recollections*, p. 68 (quotations); Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 187.

law.<sup>31</sup> One way to align masters with evangelical beliefs was to bring religious worship to the slaves. Evangelicals felt slaveholders had a duty to provide spiritual leadership for their bondservants, since slavery was an extension of God's plan to bring Christianity to the world. Few southerners would question whether Africans were better off as Christians even though enslaved, especially in comparison to their heathen relatives in Africa.<sup>32</sup> By adopting this line of thinking, evangelicals could justify their participation in the African slave trade since they thought it good fortune for a slave to be sold to a Christian owner rather than a non-Christian. Richard Furman, the noted minister, felt that church members should not purchase slaves if he or she felt it was a sin to do so. He did counsel, though, that "if all serious Christians should abstain from purchasing the slaves that are brought here, they must of course to into other hands, where it is not probable they would fare as well."<sup>33</sup>

The elimination of the African trade shifted the focus of spiritual leadership to the plantation, where masters could compel their slaves to sit through religious instruction. Finis Ewing, a Presbyterian minister in the 1820s, noted how many in the church seemed "by their conduct" towards slaves "*not* to consider them *fellow-beings*." Judging their actions, Ewing assumed that many masters were "taking no pains at all to give their servants religious instruction of any kind." He especially abhorred how some

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<sup>31</sup> Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, pp. 75-79; Chaplin, "Slavery and the Principle of Humanity," pp. 299-315.

<sup>32</sup> Rose, "Domestication of Domestic Slavery," p. 27.

<sup>33</sup> As quoted in Jimmy Gene Cobb, "A Study of White Protestants' Attitudes toward Negroes in Charleston, South Carolina, 1790-1845," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Baylor University, 1967, p. 29.

slaveholders required their “servants to work, cook, &c., while the *white* population is praying around the family altar.”<sup>34</sup>

Evangelicals also scrutinized the treatment of slaves. They thought it their Christian duty to prevent, as much as possible, many of the abuses that were too often associated with slavery. Excessive labor, extreme punishment, and the withholding of necessary food and clothing were the most common targets.<sup>35</sup> Thomas S. Clay prepared a pamphlet for the Georgia Presbytery on how masters could improve the moral condition of their slaves. He first noted that bondservants learn from the “experience of judicious, humane planters.” Owners must buttress their personal lives with procedures that promoted religious instruction, moral excellence, temperance, stable family unions, and plantation discipline.<sup>36</sup> One catechism stressed the need for masters to provide adequate clothing, abundant food, medicine, and proper care when old or infirm.<sup>37</sup> Ewing similarly complained how some members of the “visible church *half-feed, half-clothe, and oppress* their servants.” Such actions were a negative example for the slaves and non-believers.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> F. R. Cossitt, *The Life and Times of Rev. Finis Ewing*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, 1853), p. 273. Emphasis in original.

<sup>35</sup> Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 209; Startup, *Root of all Evil*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas S. Clay, *Detail of a Plan for the Moral Improvement of Negroes on Plantations* (n.p., 1833), p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Colcock Jones, *A Catechism of Scripture Doctrine and Practice, for Families and Sabbath Schools, designed also for the Oral Instruction of Colored Persons* (Savannah, 1844), as quoted in Mason Crum, *Gullah: Negro Life in the Carolina Sea Islands* (Durham, N.C., 1940), p. 204.

<sup>38</sup> Cossitt, *Finis Ewing*, p. 273. Emphasis in original.

If evangelicals were serious about bringing civilization and morality to their slaves, then the wanton operation of the interstate slave trade was a poor message to send to bondservants or to critics of slavery. The family unit was the building block of society and to endanger it was to threaten the basis of community. A thriving interstate slave trade, most evangelicals felt, worked at cross purposes to the efforts to teach slaves the virtues of American society. Even though much of southern perception of slavery involved the exclusion of slaves from many rights and privileges, most evangelical Christians would not begrudge slaves the opportunity to have a family life.<sup>39</sup> The *Western Luminary*, a publication of the Presbyterian Church, lamented the suffering associated with the slave trade. Speculation broke up families through “heathenish commerce in the blood, and sinews of human beings.” The thought of such suffering should “excite the virtuous indignation, and rouse the christian sympathies, of every individual who possesses a single spark of humanity.”<sup>40</sup> A publication intended to serve as a guide for Christian slave holders made much the same point. It stressed the need to “*keep families together*.”<sup>41</sup> Isham Harrison had already taken these lessons to heart. When his brother James sent forty-nine slaves from South Carolina to

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<sup>39</sup> Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom*, is the most trenchant argument that southerners defined their freedom in relation to slavery.

<sup>40</sup> *Western Luminary*, 23 Nov. 1831 (quotation); Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1993), pp. 95-98; Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, pp. 209-10. For one cleric’s struggles with the harshness of slavery, see William W. Freehling, “James Henley Thornwell’s Mysterious Antislavery Movement,” *Journal of Southern History*, 57 (1991): 383-406.

<sup>41</sup> Jones, *Catechism of Scripture*, as quoted in Crum, *Gullah*, p. 204. Emphasis in original.



Alabama for sale, it was hard on Isham. Several years later the devout Isham praised his brother for turning his “attention to the religion of our Lord” even while confessing that he “always regretted the sale of your negroes.” When Isham had the opportunity to buy some slaves, he tried to cushion the blow by purchasing a family. Even though Isham said he paid \$200 too much for the slaves, he admitted it was “worth something” to see slave families reunited.<sup>42</sup> One southern evangelical asserted that a Christian country should be distinguished by its belief that all men love one another. “But in what slave market is this badge exhibited,” he wondered. He also wanted to know if the label “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you do ye even so to them” was written on the whip of any slave driver.<sup>43</sup>

The fact that southern society did not recognize slave marriages as legally binding did not deter evangelicals from ascribing some type of moral equivalency to slave unions.<sup>44</sup> J. D. Paxton, a Presbyterian minister, expressed the attitude of many when he wrote that the forced separation of husbands from wives, and children from parents was “at variance with natural religion.” Such absences meant that husbands could not protect their wives, wives could not be obedient to their husbands, and neither could provide for their children. For Paxton, the interstate slave trade destroyed the integrity of the slave family and eroded the Christian basis of slavery. It did not matter to him whether the state recognized such marriages as valid since God’s natural law was

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<sup>42</sup> Isham Harrison to James Harrison, 8 Mar. 1836, James T. Harrison Papers.

<sup>43</sup> *Western Luminary*, 19 Jan. 1831, p. 322.

<sup>44</sup> Part of the problem in recognizing the legal validity of slave marriages lay in the assumption that slaves could not be a party to a contract.

important.<sup>45</sup> Separation between parent and child could be especially poignant and was hardly evidence that slavery improved the life of the enslaved. The members of Glen's Creek, Kentucky, Methodist Church were especially troubled by the actions of William Garnett, one of their own. Some members accused Garnett of "selling a Negroe Woman from her child to go down the River." The church voted to strike him from the membership roll in order to teach him a lesson about the worldly depravity of speculation. Garnett returned to fellowship once he made amends.<sup>46</sup>

It was the interstate slave trade, the evangelical churches realized, that caused most of the family separations. Philip A. Bolling, a Virginia evangelical, recognized the connection between the two. During the Virginia slavery debates, he defended slavery itself but said no one can "justify the traffic in human beings. High-minded men ought to disdain to hold their fellow creatures as articles of traffic—disregarding all the ties of blood and affection—tearing asunder all those sympathies dear to man—dividing husbands and wives, parents and children, as they would cut asunder a piece of cotton cloth." If men would read their Bibles and take to heart the command to "do unto all men as you would have them do unto you," then the slave trade would disappear.<sup>47</sup> A Presbyterian divine attacked the slave trade as one of the "palpable evils" connected with slavery. He was shocked that his brethren were caught up in the

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<sup>45</sup> J. D. Paxton, *Letters on Slavery; Addressed to the Cumberland Congregation, Virginia* (Lexington, Ken., 1833), p. 56.

<sup>46</sup> As quoted in Walter B. Posey, *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley 1776-1845* (Lexington, Ken., 1957), p. 94.

<sup>47</sup> Bolling, as quoted in Thomas, "Second Great Awakening," pp. 414-15.

traffic in human flesh and souls. Such men were “not scrupulous to whom they sell, provided they can obtain a better price!” The result was an offense to the Lord. John Early, who preached at a Methodist camp meeting in Portsmouth, Virginia, called the slave speculator “among the blackest of characters.” When a trader’s wife stopped Early after the service and said she was offended by him, he replied that “he was sorry he had injured his wife” and more sorry “she had a negro speculator for a husband.”<sup>48</sup>

Although the separation of slave families was bothersome to evangelicals, the commercial aspect of slave trading was even more alarming. The two were interconnected, since it was the speculative nature of slave sales that usually destroyed black families. Evangelicals feared that the rampant growth of slave speculation—with all of its potential for profit—would seduce church members into worshipping money rather than God. An evangelical who sold slaves to a speculator was assumed to be doing it for the wrong reasons. In 1823, for instance, the Goshen Association, a Baptist group centered in Fredericksburg, Virginia, was asked to “express an opinion on the subject of traffic in slaves as a business of speculation.” The Association’s answer was clear. It used the “strongest terms” to denounce “unhesitatingly” the “business of speculating in slaves as an unfeeling, and unchristian practice, by no means to be tolerated in the Church of Christ.”<sup>49</sup> This response stressed the business nature of the trade as the most objectionable feature rather than emphasizing the harmful aspects upon the slave family. The mere pursuit of wealth was selfish and something not to be

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<sup>48</sup> Cossitt, *Rev. Finis Ewing*, p. 273 (first and second quotations); Early, as quoted in Thomas, “Second Great Awakening,” pp. 32-33 (subsequent quotations).

<sup>49</sup> Goshen Association Minutes, p. 6, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

excused because it was diametrically opposed to the spirit of Christianity. It is not that the church was anti-money, but it was against speculation, especially when it wreaked such devastation on the lives of slaves. Such naked pursuit of wealth clouded the eyes of the true believer and caused him to take his concentration off of spiritual matters. The *Western Luminary* made its position clear. Speculators merely acted for “gold--sordid gold,--for the sake of heaping up that unrighteous mammon.” Masters who sold their slaves to speculators were “more guilty” because they enabled the trade to flourish.<sup>50</sup>

Many Christians struggled with the effects of slave speculation, as seen in the pages of the *Religious Herald*, a publication that was widely circulated amongst Virginia Baptists. A reader wondered “Where is the impropriety in any member of the church of Christ, buying and selling slaves for speculation?” He questioned the church’s opposition to the trade and challenged its authority on the matter. The writer felt it was “improper” for a Baptist church “to pass the highest censure on any member who continues this traffic.” The *Herald* noted that it had previously received questions of a similar nature, but thought it improper to answer them. Now, with its authority under fire, it blasted the reader’s attitude with a long and detailed indictment of the slave trade. It was a “manifest impropriety” for a Christian to engage in slave trafficking. Speculation, the paper noted, was “deemed a disreputable one by the world generally. Those who follow it forfeited the esteem of the community.” Since the term “negro-buyer” was often used in reproach, the Christian should avoid association with

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<sup>50</sup> *Western Luminary*, 23 Nov. 1831 (emphasis in original); Startup, *Root of all Evil*, pp. 43-44, 68.

the trade since it would dishonor “the cause of Christ.” Baptists “generally” agreed it was a “degradation of the Christian profession,” and induced other believers to harbor ill sentiments towards the malefactor. Most importantly, slave trading was “incompatible with the spirit of the gospel.” It had a “hardening tendency” and frequently snapped “asunder the cords of affection for the sake of little gain.” Speculation led owners into temptation and set a bad example since traders associated with gamblers and others riddled with vice. The only conclusion believers should draw was that it would be “wholly impracticable” to maintain a Christian character in a traffic that was concerned with the pursuit of mammon. It followed that speculation should be made a subject for church discipline since a congregation that harbored a slave trader “would be greatly paralyzed” and its “usefulness measurably destroyed.” Since the public had decided that the traffic was “discreditable,” then the church could not disregard public opinion with impunity. The *Herald*’s statement condemned the trade in the strongest terms possible, on religious, social, and moral grounds. While it pointed out the effects that the trade had on the slave, it was more concerned with the effects on the church and the white community. Believers who dabbled with the interstate slave trade were playing with fire. The lust for money could scorch the master and burn the slave.<sup>51</sup>

Owners, then, could not take their duties lightly and must strive to remain uncorrupted by the potential for evil that lay in the slaveholding relationship. There lurked about all kinds of opportunity for immoral thoughts and actions. The slaveholder who began to put the pursuit of money ahead of spiritual affairs would be tempted to

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<sup>51</sup> *Religious Herald*, 15 Apr. 1836.

sell his slaves to raise the necessary cash to gratify his desires. His personal comfort would come at the expense of the slaves' familial relations. It was this type of speculation in slaves, the desire to make money, that seemed to bother evangelicals the most. Slaveholders must strive to act in accordance with the principles of humanity and justice. Any who made "merchandize of their fellow-creatures" engaged in a "flagrant violation of duty." Elijah Eagleston, pastor of the Presbyterian church in Madisonville, Tennessee, took quick action to root out what he saw as evil in his midst. He secured the expulsion of two of his most prominent members after they sold slaves because of the high market prices. This thirst for money could spread and poison the entire congregation.<sup>52</sup> Most Christians understood the necessity to sell slaves in hard economic times or at the settlement of an estate and could sense the differences between a sale of this type and speculation in slaves. One religious writer articulated the distinction by condemning the "indiscriminate" sale of slaves as immoral, while recognizing that there were occasions where such transactions sprang from "motives of humanity." Where owners acted as humans, they realized that slaves had legitimate claims on their "sympathies." The result would be that slaves would be treated with a measure of regard for their feelings.<sup>53</sup> Speculation involved the naked pursuit of profit and came from the exploitation of the slaves. In this way, it was a twofold evil—corrupting the speculator and demeaning the slave.

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<sup>52</sup> *Western Luminary*, 23 Nov. 1831 (quotation); Ernest T. Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, vol. 1, 1607-1861 (Richmond, 1963), 1: 345.

<sup>53</sup> *Abolition Intelligencer and Missionary Magazine*, June 1822, pp. 18-22 (quotations on p. 18).

Evangelical sermons also stressed the deadly nature of the slave trade. Ewing consistently preached against the “traffic in human flesh,” referring to the disruptive effects on the slave family. He noted that many masters were not “scrupulous to whom they sell, provided they can obtain a better price.” The worldly desire for riches crowded in and led owners into temptation, leading to debasement of both master and slave. God was displeased with the situation, Ewing surmised, and doubtless heard the cries of those who were separated from their family.<sup>54</sup> Paxton also called the slave trade an “evil” that ought to convince people to reform slavery or abandon it all together. He pointed out most southerners had seen the trade, whether at the court house or in a coffle along the road, and realized that speculation involved “hundreds of thousands of dollars.” Paxton knew that the love of money was the root of all evil, so the high profits of the trade led to the blatant disregard of the slaves’ families. “No passion is more unfeeling than avarice,” he concluded. In speaking to Christians, Paxton asked any who have “hearts to feel for a fellow creature’s woes and a fellow creature’s wrongs” to work to prevent such scenes from occurring in the future.<sup>55</sup>

The growth of the interstate slave trade in the 1820s and beyond challenged the church’s relationship with slavery. A thriving trade brought the harsher features of slavery to light and forced evangelicals to reconsider their support for the peculiar institution. They desperately groped for a way to reduce speculation while simultaneously affirming their support for slavery. The three evangelical

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<sup>54</sup> Cossitt, *Finis Ewing*, p. 273 (quotations); Caleb Perry Patterson, *The Negro in Tennessee, 1790-1865* (1922; reprint, New York, 1968), pp. 131-32.

<sup>55</sup> Paxton, *Letters on Slavery*, pp. 134-35.

denominations took different approaches, with the Presbyterians taking national action, the Baptists making local efforts, and the Methodists hewing to a middle way. In 1815 the Presbyterian General Assembly officially condemned slave speculation. This national meeting of church representatives denounced the “transfer of slaves by way of traffic” and “severity” in the management of them as “inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel.” The Assembly recommended that churches “make use of all prudent measures to prevent such shameful and unrighteous conduct.”<sup>56</sup> Three years later the same body asked individual churches to “discountenance” the “cruelty of separating husband and wife, parents and children, and that which consists in selling slaves to those who will either themselves deprive these unhappy people the blessings of the gospel, or who will transport them to places where the gospel is not proclaimed.” Such actions undermined the sanctity of the family and were just grounds for “the discipline and censure of the church.” The Assembly, however, did not elaborate what punishment would be suitable for those who engaged in speculation.<sup>57</sup> It was not always easy, moreover, to prove a seller’s motives. The Concord, Kentucky, Presbyterian church excluded John Moore from church privileges for selling a boy slave at an auction. Moore appealed this decision to the Presbytery of West Lexington, which reversed the decision. The appellate presbytery expressed its “decided disapprobation of the practice of exposing slaves to publick sail” but could find no scripture that directly applied to the situation.

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<sup>56</sup> Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 1: 328 (quotations); Smith, *In His Image, but...*, p. 59.

<sup>57</sup> *Religious Remembrancer*, 20 June 1818, p. 171 (quotations); *Religious Intelligencer*, 27 June 1818, p. 60; *Abolition Intelligencer and Missionary Magazine*, July 1822, p. 36; *Niles’ Weekly Register*, supplement to vol. xvi, (1819), pp. 153-55.



Determined to ferret out the evil in its midst, the church appealed the decision to the synod, which seemed at a loss as to what to do next. After originally reversing the presbytery's decision, the synod remanded the case to the session for more information. Specifically, the synod wanted to know whether Moore took "due pains" to sell the boy at a private sale before resorting to an auction.<sup>58</sup> The evasion of the synod illustrates a crucial problem in dealing with those who sold slaves: determining motive. If Moore tried to find a private buyer, then it could be argued that he wanted the sale to be as least disruptive on the slave as possible, since the slave would remain near his family. The use of an auctioneer, on the other hand, would signal Moore's desire to profit on the transaction at the expense of the slave. Sale to a stranger likely meant exile for the slave and a higher profit for the seller. The churches could not always discern an owner's motives, so action usually became the basis of judgment.

Unlike the Presbyterians, the national church body of the Baptists made no official pronouncement on the trade. Instead it left it up to the church associations or the individual churches to set their own policies when it came to the buying and selling of slaves. One association, when mulling over what to do when there was a forcible separation of slaves, dodged the question and advised churches to "act discretionally."<sup>59</sup> There are, on the other hand, numerous examples of Baptist associations taking action against the slave trade. The Dover Association ruled in 1816 that its members who engaged in the slave traffic should be dealt with as "offenders against the laws of God

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<sup>58</sup> Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 1: 327-28.

<sup>59</sup> Daniel, "Virginia Baptists in the Early Republic," pp. 62-64.

and man.” Expulsion of this type was the strongest form of discipline available to the church.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, the Chowan Association, a group comprising eighteen churches in four counties of North Carolina, faced the problem two years later. A query, or formal question, was put to the Association asking if it was consistent for a professor of the Christian religion to “be engaged in purchasing negroes with a view to sell them to speculators.” The Association did not mince words in its reply, describing such an action as “at open war with the spirit of the gospel, and shocking to all the tender feelings of our natures.” The answer to whether a Christian should sell slaves to a speculator was an emphatic no.<sup>61</sup> Several years later the Sandy Creek Baptist Association faced the same question. In 1835 it adopted a resolution that found it “inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel of Christ, for a Christian to buy and sell negroes, for the purposes of speculation or merchandise, for gain.”<sup>62</sup>

There are numerous instances of Baptist churches taking vigorous steps to prevent the slave trade from becoming a significant factor in their members’ lives. The First Baptist Church of Richmond expelled William Muse for “breach of promise” after he broke his word to one of his slaves. Muse promised to find a local master for the man, and when he sold the slave to New Orleans, the church took action to show him

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<sup>60</sup> Reuben E. Alley, *A History of Baptists in Virginia* (Richmond, n. d.), p. 149.

<sup>61</sup> James A. Delke, *History of the North Carolina Chowan Baptist Association 1806-1881* (Raleigh, N. C., 1882), p. 80.

<sup>62</sup> George W. Purefoy, *A History of the Sandy Creek Baptist Association from its Organization in A. D. 1758, to A. D. 1858* (New York, 1859), pp. 163-64. Sandy Creek, having twenty-two churches in four counties, asked its churches to give two warnings and then exclude members who “will not abandon the practice” of buying or selling slaves for profit.

the error of his ways.<sup>63</sup> The constant buying and selling of slaves could attract the attention of other members of the congregations, as it did in the case of William E. Jones. Several of the members of the Mt. Salem Baptist Church, Virginia, had their feelings “wounded” by Jones’s actions in selling slaves “abroad.” Jones asked for a meeting so the church could make a full investigation and “deal with him as she might think proper.” In a special session, church members heard that Jones only sold the slaves to pay his debts and “did not intend to pursue the calling [i. e., slave trading] with a view to worldly aggrandizement.” The church did not censure Jones, although it made it clear that it was “*not* intending thereby however, to give countenance to negro trading, as a general practice for mere gain.” Mt. Salem “utterly oppos’d” any and all slave traders. Such local action was sporadic, however, and did not prove effective in keeping Baptists from dealing with slave traders.<sup>64</sup>

Like the Baptists, the Methodists as a national body ceased to regulate the interstate slave trade. Certain portions of the church, though, continued to operate as a brake on the growing commerce. In 1813 the Virginia Conference agreed that if any of its members were found guilty of “carrying on directly or indirectly the trade of slave speculation,” they were to be expelled.<sup>65</sup> Four years later the conference clarified the matter by affirming the principle that Methodists should not buy or sell slaves unless to

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<sup>63</sup> First Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia, Minutes (typescript), 19 Apr. 1825, p. 372, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>64</sup> Mt. Salem Baptist Church, Mt. Salem, Virginia, Minutes, 10 Mar. 1829, Library of Virginia. Emphasis in original.

<sup>65</sup> Sweet, *Virginia Methodism*, p. 200.

keep husbands, wives, parents, and children together. Such activity was, the church felt, just another form of “immorality.”<sup>66</sup> Church members could own slaves and buy and sell them as long as they did so for humanitarian reasons. What constituted humanitarianism was open to debate, and the eventual result was a permissive attitude regarding the speculation of slaves. For instance, two elders of a Virginia church were charged with buying and selling slaves, but the Conference considered some “palleating” circumstances and acquitted them.<sup>67</sup> Most likely they were able to demonstrate their good intentions in the transaction, although the justification of one sale over another was a significant loophole.

Tennessee Methodists tried to simplify the matter by specifically excluding members who bought or sold slaves for speculative profit. This stance remained the official position of the Methodist churches in Tennessee although as time passed the matter was forgotten.<sup>68</sup> The Western Conference of the Methodist church had a similar policy. Embracing the states of Tennessee and Kentucky, it called upon its members to cease their involvement in the slave trade. Such westerners were not to “sell or buy a slave unjustly, inhumanly, or covetously.” Methodists were not asked to stop all slave transactions, merely the ones that were contrary to God’s law. The rule appears to be just as much for the slaveholder as for the slave, since it was designed to protect the

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<sup>66</sup> William W. Bennett, *Memorials of Methodism in Virginia, from its Introduction into the State, in the Year 1773 to the Year 1829* (Richmond, 1871), p. 641.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas, “Second Great Awakening,” p. 80.

<sup>68</sup> Goodstein, “Black History on the Nashville Frontier,” p. 416, credits this rule and others like it as being responsible for attracting African-Americans to the Methodist church in Tennessee.

owner from the temptations of the world. While a dampened enthusiasm for the slave trade would certainly uphold the sanctity of the slave family, it would also keep the owner from falling into the trap of pursuing worldly gain at the expense of heavenly business. Suspected members were judged at the quarterly meeting and those who fell short of the standard were expelled. The provision was drawn too loosely and it was difficult to interpret the meaning of justice, humanity, and covetousness. The result was an ineffectual standard that was difficult to enforce.<sup>69</sup>

Even though evangelical denominations and church associations failed to establish clear policies in dealing with the trade, Christians worked individually to reduce speculation's impact. Mary Blackford, a devout Christian, lived in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The slave trading firm of Smith and Finnall bought a house in her neighborhood by "deceiving" the owner's son. They started converting the structure into a jail, building a sixteen foot high brick wall to keep slaves in and curious stares out. Blackford organized resistance to the "Bastille" but no one could afford to buy the property. Then, a "generous, kind-hearted Yankee" interceded and bought the house at an "exorbitant price." Blackford had the "infinite pleasure" of seeing the wall pulled down and the iron grating taken out of the windows. While Blackford's opposition to the trade may seem extreme, she was motivated by her religious beliefs and the desire to keep undesirables, both slaves and speculators, out of the area.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Charles B. Swaney, *Episcopal Methodism and Slavery: With Sidelights on Ecclesiastical Politics* (1926; reprint, New York, 1969), p. 6; Patterson, *Negro in Tennessee*, pp. 108-13.

<sup>70</sup> L. Minor Blackford, *Mine Eyes have seen the Glory: The Story of a Virginia Lady Mary Berkeley Minor Blackford 1802-1896 who taught her sons to hate Slavery*

In a similar fashion, Ann Meade Page and her husband were evangelicals who taught many of their two hundred slaves to read and write, despite the neighbors' protests. When Page's husband died in 1826, she faced a difficult situation. Page wanted to colonize her slaves, but state law required her to pay creditors first. The result was a public auction of half the slaves at Annfield Plantation. She was well aware that some of her slaves might fall into the hands of slave traders, a result she abhorred. On the day of the sale several traders showed up at the auction, so Page retreated to her study and prayed that none of her slaves be purchased by the speculators. Her prayers were answered as none of the slaves went to owners far from Annfield. Page even had some money left over, which she used send some of the remaining slaves to Liberia.<sup>71</sup>

The Reverend John Jones refused to have any dealings with slave traders. He deplored the slave trade and sometime around 1825 came upon an acquaintance and a slave trader. When Jones refused to speak to the speculator, "this dealer in human flesh rudely knocked off my hat, and began to abuse me for 'not speaking to a *gentleman*.'" Jones turned the other cheek, retrieved his hat, and rode off. After the slave trader boasted about knocking off the Jones's hat, a good friend arranged for a writ to be

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*and to love the Union*, F. Nash Boney, ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1954, pp. 39-42, quotations on pp. 41, 42). Finnall was likely N. C. Finnall, who later teamed with Theophilus Freeman in a long-distance slave trading firm (Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South*, p. 26). The identity of Smith is unknown. Finnall and Smith moved their operation to a different part of town after Blackford chased them away.

<sup>71</sup> C. W. Andrews, *Memoir of Mrs. Ann Page*, 2nd ed. (1856, reprint; New York, 1984), pp. 30, 44-45, 52-53.

sworn out against the man. When the speculator was hauled before the town's magistrate, he paid a fine and "confessed the turpitude of his unjustified act."<sup>72</sup>

Evangelicals may have taken strength from the denunciations of the slave trade they read in religious publications. The *Western Luminary* had no sympathy for two slave traders who were killed by the slaves they were escorting to Natchez. Calling the murder the "*Awful Judgment of Heaven upon Slave-Traders*," the *Luminary* implied that the "inhuman and merciless" actions of the speculators justified their being bludgeoned to death and weighted down with stones to sink to the bottom of the Ohio River. Following the incident, the paper printed a reader's letter from two years earlier that detailed the horrible practices of this specific trader, as if his brutality excused the actions of the slaves. The letter closed with the ominous line, "*Heaven will curse that man who engages in such traffic, and the government that protects him in it.*" Instead of calling for the apprehension of the slaves who were still at large, the publication urged the legislature of Kentucky to "put a stop to this abominable traffic." The sharp words drew no protest from readers.<sup>73</sup> The *Christian Advocate*, a publication affiliated with the Methodist church, attributed the grisly death of the slave traders to the "*Shocking effects of Slave-trading*" and reprinted much of the *Luminary*'s

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<sup>72</sup> John G. Jones "Autobiography", pp. 75-76, manuscript in Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Emphasis in original.

<sup>73</sup> *Western Luminary*, 4 Oct. 1826, p. 108. Emphasis in original. Edward and Howard Stone, the traders, died alongside two other white men on the boat. This incident and others like it will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. That there was no protest from readers is inferred from the lack of letters in subsequent issues. The *Luminary* did print letters of readers who disagreed with its editorials (*Ibid.*, 23 Nov. 1831, 18 Jan. 1832).

information.<sup>74</sup> These Christian publications did not condemn the actions of the slaves, despite the obvious threat that such a massacre would have on white hegemony. The fear of slave revolt was constant in the South and the *Luminary*'s words gave no comfort to jittery whites. There was almost an implied sanction to the deed, as if the evil actions of the traders needlessly provoked the slaves into armed rebellion.

The coverage of the religious publications is in stark contrast to secular newspapers. One described the "horrid crime" and "shocking deed" in great detail. It described the "plundering" of the boat and the "timely vigilance" of citizens in rounding up the slaves.<sup>75</sup> Another labeled the deed a "DREADFUL MASSACRE!!!!" and described how one of the slaves defended his master to the end. At least the "miserable beings concerned in the murder of their masters" were arrested, convicted, and sentenced to hanging.<sup>76</sup> One account of the "Horrible Massacre" sought to instill sympathy for the "unfortunate victims."<sup>77</sup> Such reactions were in line with one might expect from white society: shock that whites were murdered, no sympathy for the slaves, and a call for retribution. No matter how awful the actions of the traders, the slaves were not justified in their actions because they engaged in the ultimate form of disobedience. That these attitudes were noticeably absent from religious publications

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<sup>74</sup> *Christian Advocate*, 21 Oct. 1826, p. 27. Emphasis in original.

<sup>75</sup> *Louisville Gazette*, 22 Sept. 1826, as quoted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 14 Oct. 1826, p. 33.

<sup>76</sup> *Lexington Kentucky Gazette*, 29 Sept., 27 Oct. 1826.

<sup>77</sup> *Lexington Kentucky Reporter*, 25 Sept. 1826. Accounts with a similar perspective are found in *Woodville Republican*, 14 Oct. 1826; and *Milledgeville Southern Recorder*, 24 Oct. 1826.



shows the difficulty that evangelicals had in reconciling the trade to their Christian beliefs.

As time wore on, evangelicals found it increasingly difficult to condemn the slave trade and remain loyal to slavery. The abolitionist campaign increased in the 1830s and forced southern churches to swing around to slavery's defense. Some of the most biting criticism of the peculiar institution came from northern churches and northern Christians. These attacks came on a broad front, including political, moral, and religious grounds. Abolitionists used scripture to indict slaveholders and southerners in general. The Presbyterian Synod of Cincinnati was especially vocal in pushing for deliberate and concrete action that would put slavery on the road to extinction. It resolved that the buying or selling of slaves "for the sake of gain" was a "heinous sin and scandal." Since such sins prevailed "to an alarming extent" in the nation and the church, the synod called for a day of prayer and fasting to help "the people of color in our land." Such prayers were as much for the petitioners as they were for the slaves, since the church was trying to deliver the country from God's wrath.<sup>78</sup> The Chillicothe, Ohio, Presbytery adopted a similar statement. It held that the "buying, selling, or holding a human being as property, is, in the sight of God, a heinous sin."<sup>79</sup>

Southern clergy raced to their Bibles to prove that God's word upheld the peculiar institution, and as a result, the church became the "bulwark" of slavery from

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<sup>78</sup> *Western Luminary*, 1 Dec. 1830, p. 290.

<sup>79</sup> Walter B. Posey, "The Slavery Question in the Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest," *Journal of Southern History* (1949): 322 (quotation); Smith, *In His Image, but...*, p. 81.

the 1830s. Synods, presbyterians, associations, and conferences began issuing statements that the Bible sanctioned slavery. Eventually the southern pro-slavery argument united religion and morality with slavery, investing the sectional conflict with a profound religious significance.<sup>80</sup> Once the southern clergy began to defend the peculiar institution at all costs, southerners with qualms about slavery no longer could speak out for fear of being branded as disloyal. Nor could they risk questioning an objectionable portion of slavery like the slave trade. For example, in 1835 a minority report of the Synod of Kentucky leaked out that blasted the slave trade. The report described the trade as especially odious because it exposed slaves to sale “like a beast of the field” and led to their transportation “in chains, like a felon.” Such actions were a “flagrant violation of every principle of mercy, justice, and humanity.” The instability of slave family life produced licentiousness in them since they had no guarantee of a permanent family. While the separation of slave families was hateful, “cupidity” was often worse, since it corrupted those who sold slaves. The writers asked preachers to read the lengthy address to their congregations, although it is likely that most did not.<sup>81</sup> Northern anti-slavery activists used it as an indictment of southern society and reprinted

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<sup>80</sup> Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, p. 53 (quotation); Goen, *Broken Churches*, pp. 66-67; Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, pp. 194-96. For an early, and unusual, Biblical defense of the slave trade, see Warrenton (Virginia) *Palladium of Liberty*, 25 Feb. 1820. The author, an “*Inquisitive Slave-holder*,” cited the examples Abraham and Joseph to prove that “*buying African servants and holding them for a possession – is warranted by written word of God.*” Emphasis in the original. Several times he referred to the purchase of African slaves, although it is possible he was extending his argument, by implication, to the domestic slave trade.

<sup>81</sup> Committee of the Synod of Kentucky, *An Address to the Presbyterians of Kentucky, Proposing a Plan for the Instruction and Emancipation of their Slaves* (Cincinnati, 1835), quotations on pp. 5, 12.

it widely. Once northerners started using the report to attack slavery, southern moderates were discredited; any condemnation of the slave trade made them look like abolitionists. The committee's report just worsened the situation and encouraged those who would oppose the slave trade to remain silent on the issue.<sup>82</sup>

In such a divisive atmosphere it could hardly be expected that the national church structures could survive. They did not. The Presbyterian Church was the first to buckle under the strain. When anti-slavery advocates within the church pushed for a statement on slavery in 1836, the General Assembly ruled that it was a legal matter and not the province of the church. The following year, the church divided.<sup>83</sup> In 1845 the Baptist church split along sectional lines due, in large part, to the slavery issue. The issue that triggered the schism was whether missionaries could be slaveholders.<sup>84</sup> The Methodist Church, too, fell victim to agitation over slavery. A report of the Tennessee Methodist Conference in 1836 called slavery an "evil" but one that was subject only to civil authority. The church could do nothing except "require kindness" on the part of owners towards their slaves. As a result, the "indiscriminate" traffic in slaves was cruel, criminal, and subject to church discipline. Just what constituted the

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<sup>82</sup> The most provocative portions of the address were reprinted in Weld, *American Slavery as It Is*, p. 167; Jay, *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 259; and John G. Palfrey, *The Inter-State Slave Trade: Anti-Slavery Tract No. 5*, 1855, reprinted in *Anti-Slavery Tracts, Series I, Numbers 1-20, 1855-1856* (New York, 1970), p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> Posey, "Slavery Question in the Presbyterian Church," p. 322; Smith, *In His Image, but...*, p. 81.

<sup>84</sup> David T. Bailey, *Shadow on the Church: Southwestern Evangelical Religion and the Issue of Slavery, 1783-1860* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), pp. 241-44; Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, pp. 134-38; Posey, *Baptist Church*, pp. 97-98.

indiscriminate traffic in slaves was not defined and left it wide open for debate. Owners could now justify nearly any transaction involving slaves.<sup>85</sup> In 1840 a British delegate to the General Conference raised the issue of slavery. After much debate, the Conference affirmed that the buying and selling of slaves was forbidden, but upheld the institution of slavery itself. It was an attempt at compromise between North and South, but southern delegates vehemently fought against the ban on selling slaves. When northern Methodists pushed for enforcement on the rules regarding slavery, southerners refused to consider issue. They insisted that slavery was subject to civil regulation and was not open to moral debate. Within four years the church split.<sup>86</sup>

Once the southern churches began to defend slavery aggressively, evangelicals excused the actions of slaveholders. Most looked for ways to justify slavery and explain its ill effects rather than seeking to question its objectionable aspects. Evangelicals had to find ways to explain the slave trade rather than decry its negative effects. James Smylie, who led a church in Mississippi, refuted the allegations of the Chillicothe Presbytery. He stressed that masters were patriarchal leaders of their slave families who had specific duties for their slaves. In this case, since most slaveholders were “honest [,] scrupulous and conscientious,” slavery itself was not sinful. When masters acted as Christians, the result was beneficial to the slaves, who received food, clothing, medical attention, and religious instruction. The slave trade, he also

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<sup>85</sup> *Liberator*, 9 Apr. 1836, p. 57. The Conference blamed abolitionists for agitating on the subject and needlessly raising passions.

<sup>86</sup> Purifoy, “Southern Methodist Church,” p. 352; Bucke, ed., *History of American Methodism*, 2: 17-18; Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, pp. 131-34.

explained, was a natural part of slavery. Smylie noted that Abraham bought slaves and treated them well. Joseph's sale to slave traders shows that the practice was common in Biblical days. The fact that Abraham prospered and Joseph rose to high rank in Egypt was enough for Smylie to conclude that God sanctioned the slave trade.<sup>87</sup> Smylie was not the only Presbyterian minister to defend the interstate slave trade. George Junkin argued that the Bible clearly condoned slave sales. He pointed to the example of Moses, but also noted how the Hebrews bought servants from "heathens" and held them in perpetual servitude. In this way, God used righteous masters to teach salvation to their slaves. The implication of Junkin's reasoning was not only should Christians hold slaves, but they were justified in buying more because it could be construed as a missionary activity.<sup>88</sup>

The newly created Southern Baptist Church became increasingly vocal in its defense of slavery and put scripture to use to show that God ordained the peculiar institution. Part of slavery's defense involved a changed opinion about the slave trade. In 1835 the Savannah River Association of the Baptist Church was asked if slaves who were involuntarily separated could re-marry. The Association felt that such separations were equal to death, since there was virtually no hope of being reunited. To forbid slaves to re-marry would expose the parties to "greater hardships" and "stronger temptations." In the eyes of this Association, then, the sale of slaves to the Deep South

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<sup>87</sup> James Smylie, *Review of a Letter, from the Presbytery of Chillicothe, to the Presbytery of Mississippi, on the subject of Slavery* (Woodville, 1836), pp. 4 (quotation), 16-19; Sparks, "Mississippi's Apostle of Slavery," p. 95.

<sup>88</sup> George Junkin, *The Integrity of Our National Union vs. Abolitionism* (Cincinnati, 1843), pp. 30-31, 37-39, 43.

was equivalent to a death sentence. Sales that separated families were so frequent that there had to be a ruling that made it possible for the relatively smooth functioning of plantations.<sup>89</sup>

A popular Baptist publication, the *Religious Herald*, also defended the slave trade. Although it had earlier denounced the trade, the *Herald* changed its opinion by 1848. A reader wondered if it was proper to be a slave trader if he conducted his business “on principles of humanity.” Such a discussion, the paper answered, would neither be “profitable nor interesting.” No general rule could be laid down because each case must be decided on its own merits. The church normally excluded speculators from fellowship, but the *Herald* realized that auctioneers and general agents often had to “dispose” of slaves as well. Since there could be no overall judgment of slave traders, there was “neither precept nor example in Scripture in regard to the traffic.” All cases must be decided on their own merits, “as exceptions from ordinary rules.” The paper, in essence, accepted the presence of the slave trade in southern society when it offered no more resistance to it.<sup>90</sup> Baptists had come to recognize that speculation, while troublesome, was not an issue that deserved much attention or debate because it was a normal course of southern society. To question the trade would be to open the door to an even broader examination of slavery, something that zealous anti-slavery northerners were only too willing to do.

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<sup>89</sup> William G. Goodell, *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice: Its Distinctive Features shown by its Statutes, Judicial Decisions, and Illustrative Facts* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1853), p. 109.

<sup>90</sup> *Religious Herald*, 27 Apr. 1848.

The Southern Methodist Church did the most dramatic turnabout. Its General Conference in effect sanctioned the domestic slave trade without specifically mentioning it. When the church split, the southern wing kept the 1789 General Rule of the *Discipline* that forbade the “buying and selling of men, women, and children, with the intention to enslave them.” Attempts to repeal it in 1846 and 1850 were unsuccessful, but the 1854 Conference interpreted the clause as “referring exclusively to the slave trade, as prohibited by the Constitution and the laws of the United States,” in other words, the African trade. Since the domestic trade had no legislative strictures associated with it, the implication was that it was not off limits for Methodists.<sup>91</sup> Two years later the Conference decided the rule was “ambiguous” and was “liable to be construed as antagonistic to the institution of slavery.” Since the church had no right to “meddle” with slavery, the rule was expunged. The general attitude of the Methodist Church towards the slave trade went from antagonism, to tepid opposition, to noninterference, to support.<sup>92</sup>

By 1840 most evangelical churches came to accept the slave trade as a regular and necessary part of southern society. In the 1820s it was still possible to think that slavery might just someday go away, and options such as colonization were still seriously discussed. Once colonization was proved impractical, most people realized that there was no quick resolution of the problem and “a marked change in public

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<sup>91</sup> Charles Elliott, *History of the Great Secession from the Methodist Episcopal Church in the Year 1845* (Cincinnati, 1855), p. 824; Takaki, *Pro-Slavery Crusade*, p. 139; Swaney, *Episcopal Methodism*, pp. 246-47.

<sup>92</sup> Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 204; Takaki, *Pro-Slavery Crusade*, p. 136.

opinion on the subject of slavery took place in the South. All doubt as to the lawfulness of the institution, under existing circumstances, was banished from the public mind," according to the Reverend Jeremiah Jeter. He noticed that southern evangelicals no longer questioned the permanence of slavery, but actively worked to defend it. By the same token, they dropped any opposition to interstate slave trade and some even defended it. Evangelicals, moreover, became silent when it came to denouncing the trade as encouraging a love of money. They could do so by excusing the motives of slaveholders. As we shall see, it came to be generally accepted in the South that slave traders, or at least traders of a specific type, were to blame for speculation and not the owner. An emerging belief system exonerated owners for any culpability in selling their slaves to speculators. With masters no longer responsible for the slave trade's abuses, the church did not have to hold them accountable for speculation.<sup>93</sup>

The active defense of the slave trade is epitomized in the writing of Iverson Brookes. He realized that the interstate slave trade was integral to the South and must be defended from abolitionist attacks. Brookes saw through the abolitionists' plans. They wanted to exclude slavery from the territories and prevent the "domestic interchange" of slaves in the District of Columbia. The South cannot "yield tamely" to the exclusion of slaves in the territory because a prohibition of all "domestic interchange" would follow. Manumission was next, and then perhaps the division of "our other property." Clearly Brookes felt threatened by the increasingly hostile tone of the abolitionists, but he still hesitated to use the words "slave trade." That he used a

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<sup>93</sup> Jeter, *Recollections*, p. 68 (quotation); Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, p. 187.



euphemism for it indicates that there was a recognition that the slave trade was an objectionable part of slavery even while it was accepted as good and necessary.<sup>94</sup>

As the church became the vanguard of the proslavery movement, it was necessary to prevent any quibbling over the problems concerning the interstate trade. Slavery in all its forms must be protected, and that meant the church must drop any qualms it had concerning the buying and selling of slaves. The churches increasingly looked at slavery itself as a civil matter and separated it from the spiritual realm. Methodists, for instance, modified their views so that the church should not interfere with civil relations, thus ensuring that the presence of slavery was no longer open for debate.<sup>95</sup> The separation of the sacred from the secular meant an acceptance of the slave trade and the belief that concerns about speculative activity were misguided. Once the southern churches dropped all effective resistance to speculation, the slave lost his most influential advocate. Individual masters were less likely to be held accountable for the ravages of the slave trade because doing so would open up the entire system for criticism. As abolitionist pressure on the South increased, evangelicals ceased their criticism of slavery since such attacks could be construed as disloyal. The church fell silent on the issue of speculation, and like much of the rest of southern society, looked for some other way to explain the interstate slave trade.

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<sup>94</sup> Iverson L. Brookes, *A Defence of the South against the Reproaches and Incroachments of the North* (Hamburg, S.C., 1850), p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, pp. 238-39.

## Chapter Six

Edward Stone was one of Kentucky's early speculators, using his house in Paris as a base of operations for the slave trade by at least 1816. He normally bought a group of slaves in Maryland, to which he added more as he marched westward.<sup>1</sup> Stone became notorious in Kentucky for his shenanigans. Sometimes he forced his slaves to carry an American flag as they marched from Paris to an embarkation point on the Ohio River. Once, when a female slave refused to go with him, he struck her over the head with the butt of his whip, tied her up, and carried her off.<sup>2</sup> Stone was also known to steal slaves and once used a hatchet during an attack on his neighbor.<sup>3</sup>

In 1826 Stone and his nephew Howard made their usual purchase of bondservants. They and their two assistants, David Cobb and James Gray, loaded the seventy-five slaves on a flatboat. A passenger named Davis of Natchez boarded at

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<sup>1</sup> J. Winston Coleman, Jr., *Slavery Times in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill, 1940), p. 144; Frederick A. Wallis and Hambleton Tapp, eds., *A Sesquicentennial History of Kentucky*, 4 vols. (Hopkinsville, Ken., 1945), 1: 416. Notice that Stone bought slaves in Maryland is found in *Western Luminary*, 27 Sept. 1826, p. 100; and *Lexington Kentucky Reporter*, 25 Sept. 1826. Stone's home, "The Grange," still exists (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 28 Nov. 1993; Beth L. Savage, ed. *African American Historic Places* (Washington, 1994), p. 231).

<sup>2</sup> *Western Luminary*, 4 Oct. 1826, p. 108; Undated Paris, Kentucky *Western Citizen*, as quoted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Nov. 1822, p. 59. There is a woodcut of the slaves carrying the flag in the January and February 1823 issues of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*.

<sup>3</sup> *Montjoy v. Stone*, 22 Apr. 1822, Box 115, Record Group 530; *Roe v. Stone*, Aug. 1822, Box 121, Record Group 562; *Mallory v. Stone*, 28 June 1824, Box 28, Record Group 599, Bourbon County Circuit Court Manuscripts, Kentucky State Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky.

Louisville. As the boat drifted down the river, the slaves made plans to take matters into their own hands. On Sunday morning, September 17, about one hundred miles past Louisville, the slaves “rose upon the white men...and murdered the whole.”<sup>4</sup> Howard Stone, Edward Stone, Gray, and Cobb were at breakfast in the cabin when the bondservants took billets of wood and bludgeoned them to death. Davis swam to shore during the melee, but was captured and killed. The slaves then weighted the five bodies with stones and dropped them in the river. They took two thousand dollars in specie from the boat before sinking it near the Indiana shore. After concealing the evidence, about twenty of the slaves, including those involved in the killings, immediately took off on their own. The other fifty-six slaves remained in a group and were not able to get far from the boat before being arrested. Within a few days, all of the money was recovered and all but one or two of the slaves were captured and conveyed to Hardinsburgh, Kentucky.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Louisville Gazette*, 22 Sept. 1826, as quoted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 14 Oct. 1826, p. 33. The event’s description is taken from this source and the following: *Lexington Kentucky Gazette*, 29 Sept., 6 Oct., 27 Oct. 1826; *Lexington Kentucky Reporter*, 25 Sept., 2 Oct., 9 Oct. 1826; *Woodville Republican*, 14 Oct. 1826; *New Orleans Louisiana Advertiser*, 24 Oct. 1826; *Huntsville Southern Recorder*, 24 Oct. 1826; *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 14 Oct. 1826, pp. 104-5; *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 26 Dec. 1826, p. 95; *Western Luminary*, 27 Sept., p. 100; 4 Oct. 1826, p. 108; and *Christian Advocate*, 14 Oct. 1826. The account in Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky*, pp. 173-76 differs slightly from this one.

<sup>5</sup> In the wake of the attack, newspapers reassured a nervous public that all was well and “the plot was laid by a few” slaves. The others were “drawn into it with serious reluctance.” Lest citizens be alarmed, some of the slaves “defended their masters with all the means in their power.” A “yellow boy” named Lewis supposedly defended Stone to the end and received his freedom and a small tract of land with a cabin near Stone’s home (*Lexington Kentucky Gazette*, 27 Oct., 29 Sept. 1826; Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky*, p. 175).

The trial was swift and sure. The Commonwealth of Kentucky charged eleven of the slaves with the crime and arraigned them on October 17. The bondservants pleaded not guilty and the next day Jo White, Dick Smothers, Reizin Johnston, Stephen, and Wesley were convicted of murdering James Gray, and Edward and Howard Stone. The other six slaves were strongly suspected of complicity in the murder but were acquitted. Three days later the judge sentenced the five men “to be hanged by the neck until dead.” They met their fate on the gallows on November 29, 1826. As for the rest of the slaves in Stone’s coffle, forty-seven of them were sold for transportation out of the state, while the rest remained in Kentucky, presumably to be sold, as well.<sup>6</sup>

Even though acquiescence in the interstate slave trade was the rule, as the example of the slaves in Stone’s coffle suggests, not all bondservants consented to forcible deportation. Many fought back with desperate measures—rebellion, murder, suicide, or flight. Others chose more subtle methods—influencing a sale or persuading someone not to purchase them. The emotional nature of slave sales created conditions where slaves were more likely to challenge white oppression. Having suddenly to leave friends, family, and familiar surroundings could be overwhelming and lead to precipitous decisions. These choices, in a general sense, eroded the credibility of speculators because it seemed as if they could not control their slaves.<sup>7</sup> Masters valued

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<sup>6</sup> Breckenridge Circuit Court Order Book 7, pp. 183, 194, 219, Kentucky State Archives; *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 18 Nov. 1826, p. 192.

<sup>7</sup> For two other works that deal with resistance to the slave trade, but place it in a different context, see Deyle, “Domestic Slave Trade,” pp. 211-51; and Walter Livezey Johnson, “Masters and Slaves in the Market: Slavery and the New Orleans Trade, 1804-1864,” Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1995.

control in the relationships with their slaves and used coercive measures to force compliance. When bondservants engaged in active resistance to a sale, however, reports of their activities fed the underlying fear of a slave revolt. Traders, of course, responded to slave activity by taking extra precautions in the sale and transportation of bondservants. More importantly, though, they reacted to doubts about the trade's efficacy. Speculators employed various means to counteract a negative public perception of the interstate slave trade while simultaneously separating themselves from the offensive portions of speculation. Traders carefully cultivated the idea that it was possible to separate speculation from the men who engaged in it. They successfully created the idea that there were different types of traders who had distinct places in southern society. As a result, southerners could blame a lowly class of itinerant traders for slavery's abuses while fully accepting the activities of prosperous speculators.

The slave trade, although a means of redistributing the South's labor force, also created conditions where slaves were more likely to resist servitude. Speculators usually chose slaves who had the potential to be the best laborers. They used highly selective purchasing practices that might have made efficient use of labor but were destructive of slave marriages and families. Traders tended to purchase young male slaves for the Louisiana market (because of sugar cane's influence), and female slaves of proven fertility. In the nineteenth century, it is estimated that over half of all the slaves in the Upper South were separated from a parent or child because of forcible separation (the slave trade or migration).<sup>8</sup> John Brown, for instance, remembered how

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<sup>8</sup> Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 146-54.

his mother begged the speculator to let her kiss her son one last time.<sup>9</sup> Charles Ball's last memory of his mother was her sobbing and beating the shoulders of the speculator who had just purchased him. The separation of child from parent was just the start. Forcible separation also destroyed approximately one-third of all slave marriages in the Upper South.<sup>10</sup> For Moses Grandy, the slave trade ruined his life. He tried to speak to his wife while a speculator carried her away, but the trader used a pistol to keep Grandy at a distance. Grandy later confided that he could have said very little anyway because his heart was broken. "I have never seen or heard from her from that day to this," he lamented, "I loved her as I love my life."<sup>11</sup>

In addition to being separated from their families, slaves in the Upper South dreaded the prospect of leaving behind everything they knew. Maryland slaves of the 1820s viewed their removal to Georgia or New Orleans as a virtual death sentence. James Williams, a slave who lived in Powhatan County, Virginia, before escaping, knew that slaves feared the power of their masters to sell them. He wrote that it was "an awful thing to a Virginia slaves to be sold for the Alabama and Mississippi country."<sup>12</sup> Slaves' aversion to the interstate trade was so great that some masters used

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<sup>9</sup> Boney, ed., *Slave Life in Georgia*, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, p. 11 (quotation); Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 169-77.

<sup>11</sup> Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave in the United States of America* (Boston, 1844), p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*, p. 32 (quotation); T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington, Ken., 1997), p. 75.

the threat of sale to Georgia as a way of intimidating slaves into changing their conduct. Rumors of harsh conditions in Georgia and Louisiana swirled through the quarters. Frederick Douglass remembered how slaves were scared of being sold to a trader who would carry them to Georgia.<sup>13</sup> Slaves heard stories of having to march barefoot for hundreds of miles with a minimum of food and clothing. One recalled that bondservants in coffles went “bare-headed and bare-footed, with any rag they can themselves find wrapped around their bodies.”<sup>14</sup> The words of one song testify to speculation’s threat:

Mammy, is Ol’ Massa gwin’er sell us tomorrow?  
 Yes, my chile.  
 Whar he gwin’er sell us?  
 Way down South in Georgia.<sup>15</sup>

It was too much for many slaves to bear; they wept bitterly but found no solace. Henry Box Brown explained the “frantic screams” and “scalding tears” associated with auctions and coffles. For Brown it was as simple as the declaration that slaves have feelings and knew too well the permanence of family separations.<sup>16</sup>

Twentieth century observers tend to think of the whip as emblematic of slavery’s harshness, but the lash “was not the ultimate sanction of the master’s authority.” Sale or even the threat of sale “may have been the keystone of coercive

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<sup>13</sup> Torrey, *Portraiture of Domestic Slavery*, p. 61; Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass*, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony*, p. 138.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977), p. 15

<sup>16</sup> [Henry Box Brown], *Narrative of Henry Box Brown* (Boston, 1849), p. 31.

slave control.” A master’s ability to separate slaves irrevocably from their families and loved ones was a type of punishment that inflicted mental and spiritual anguish far in excess of the physical pain produced by the whip. The sale of disobedient slaves was the most powerful long-term technique of discipline because bondservants feared the threat of sale more than any other punishment.<sup>17</sup> At first glance, it appears that owners pursued two seemingly contradictory ideas: supporting the slave trade and promoting strong slave families. The concepts, however, could be used to accomplish the same end—control over slaves. An owner who encouraged family development could suddenly revoke that “privilege” and use it as leverage. In this way, the slave family became one of the owner’s most effective tools in maintaining effective discipline of his slaves. Charles Manigault, a South Carolina planter, established sale as the highest rung on his ladder of discipline. He first dealt with recalcitrant slaves by tying them up. If that failed, time in the Savannah jail was next. Barring any improvement, the next step was solitary confinement. The last option was sale. Manigault wrote about one particularly problematic slave that “if he dont change for the better, I’ll sell him to a slave trader who will send him to New Orleans, where I have already sent several of the gang for their misconduct, or their running away for no cause.”<sup>18</sup> Sale was a decisive way to get rid of difficult slaves. John Knight was tired of dealing with his slave James

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<sup>17</sup> George M. Fredrickson, “Masters and Mudsills: The Role of Race in the Planter Ideology of South Carolina,” *South Atlantic Urban Studies*, 2 (1978): 40 (quotation); Norrece T. Jones, Jr., *Born a Child of Freedom yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina* (Hanover, N. H.: 1990), pp. 3, 37-38.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Manigault, as quoted in William Dusinger, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (New York, 1996), p. 126.



Allen, who had once been free. Knight described Allen as a “troublesome” slave who would “infect the rest [of the slaves] with discontent and insubordination.”<sup>19</sup> He sold the man rather than risk further trouble.

The sale of one slave would often be enough of an example to influence the behavior of others. Not only did the sale or threat of sale have an impact on the slave who was being disciplined, but it also affected the other slaves in the community. Owners understood very well the dramatic impact that sales had upon the slaves they owned. John Haywood wrote that one of his slave women was becoming “discontented and possibly dissatisfied.” She was “unwilling to work,” an attitude he found “trifling” and “useless.” He could not tolerate her “hurtful” example because it enabled others to “excuse themselves from work and to be idle and complaining.” Haywood, who purchased the woman at a court sale, quickly sold her in order to be rid of the headache and to ward off any others who might try to shirk their duties. It became the “frequent custom” in the Chesapeake area for owners to try to reform their “bad slaves” by “terrifying them with threats of selling them for the Georgia market, or ‘to Carolina’ them.”<sup>20</sup>

Speculators, probably more than most, realized they dealt with a potentially volatile slave population and took steps to prevent resistance. A common method was surprise. Traders and masters often worked together to make sure slaves had no time to consider how to thwart a sale. An Alabama planter wrote his agent to use “surprise &

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<sup>19</sup> John Knight to Beall, 7 July 1844, John Knight Papers.

<sup>20</sup> John Haywood to Mrs. Brickell, 25 Apr. 1815, Ernest Haywood Papers (first quotation); Torrey, *Portraiture of Domestic Slavery*, p. 61 (second quotation).

secrecy” lest the slave run away. Reuben Madison was sold so suddenly that he had no chance to say goodbye to his wife.<sup>21</sup> Once traders took possession of slaves, they used numerous measures to reduce the chance of outright revolt and force compliance. The most obvious was physical punishment. Traders who were dissatisfied with their slaves could flog them, trying to beat them into “looking bright.”<sup>22</sup> In the coastwise trade, speculators segregated slaves by sex, prohibited males from seeing the females at night, and confined all slaves in the ship’s hold at night. During the day bondservants normally roamed the deck, lest they become too resentful of being confined in close quarters. Should they prove to be unmanageable, they could be bolted to the deck.<sup>23</sup>

For those slaves forced to march in coffles, some traders tried to lift the spirits of their bondservants, and thus reduce the risk of resistance, by forcing them to sing, dance, or listen to an instrument.<sup>24</sup> Music was not usually sufficient, so traders normally used chains to keep slaves from fleeing the coffle, fighting one another, or killing the slave trader. Females, children, and older slaves usually were not shackled since they were less likely to run away. Male slaves, especially those who had just been forcibly separated from their families, were more likely to feel that they had nothing to lose in an escape attempt. The threat of a beating or even death was preferable to

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<sup>21</sup> Walter Woodyard to Dear Sir, 22 Aug. 1830, as quoted in Deyle, “Domestic Slave Trade,” p. 219 (quotation); Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony*, p. 185.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia*, pp. 98, 115-16 (quotation); Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony*, pp. 175, 180.

<sup>23</sup> *Niles’ National Register*, 22 Jan. 1842, pp. 323-26.

<sup>24</sup> *Southern Agriculturist*, 9 (1836): 70-75; Deyle, “Domestic Slave Trade,” p. 102.

submission for these slaves. Leg irons and handcuffs were a means of discipline that was based on experience. Similarly, traders normally did not permit slaves to speak to one another unless heard by one of the white escorts. Speculators did not want slaves encouraging one another to resort to desperate measures. Others used bribes to cajole cooperation from their slaves. Speculator Obadiah Fields recorded that “it was understood that I should give the negroes a Present if they would try to get homes and not do any thing against the intrust of their sales.”<sup>25</sup>

Slaves resisted traders often enough that the threat of rebellion was omnipresent in coffles. Some bondservants just wanted to escape and did not contemplate further violence. Slaves encamped near Raleigh, for instance, tried to flee before being secured for the night. One slave used a stone to knock the speculator to the ground while five others ran away.<sup>26</sup> Speculators named Whitfield and Tompkins traveled through North Carolina with a coffle of seventeen bondservants. Near the Chowan River, six armed runaway slaves attacked the group and drove off the speculators. Two of the slaves in the coffle joined the band while the others fled.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, slaves held in the Alexandria slave pens rioted in 1825. Their anger “was directed at the dealers in slaves” and it took “much scuffling” with police officers to restore order.<sup>28</sup> Other

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<sup>25</sup> List of Slave Sales, 11 Feb. 1828, Obadiah Fields Papers, Duke.

<sup>26</sup> Unidentified Raleigh newspaper, as quoted in *Western Luminary*, 9 Nov. 1825, p. 279.

<sup>27</sup> *Lexington (Virginia) Intelligencer*, 29 May 1824.

<sup>28</sup> *Washington National Gazette*, 6 Aug. 1825, as quoted in *Western Luminary*, 24 Aug. 1825, p. 110.

bondservants sought a more direct form of revenge and killed their oppressors. In 1799 members of a slave gang killed a man named Speers, although it is unclear whether or not he was a trader.<sup>29</sup> A slave in Cumberland County, Virginia, shot the man who bought his wife and children. The bondservant carefully planned the attack, lying in wait for some time before he “lodged the contents of a musket in the side of the unfortunate Mr. Polling.” Authorities arrested the man and put him on trial.<sup>30</sup>

Several high profile attacks on slave traders occurred between 1826 and 1829. Edward Stone met an untimely end in 1826, but there was another widely publicized uprising the same year. Austin Woolfolk put twenty-nine Maryland slaves on board the *Decatur*, a ship scheduled to sail from Baltimore to New Orleans. Somewhere off the coast of Georgia the slaves mutinied, threw the captain and the mate overboard, and steered the ship towards Haiti. The *Constitution* overtook the *Decatur* and took seventeen slaves off of it, as many as could be safely transferred. Three days later the *Rooke* found the *Decatur* and escorted it to New York. One slave, William Bowser, stood trial in that city for mutiny and murder. After his conviction, Bowser made a farewell speech from the gallows on Ellis Island where he reputedly addressed Austin Woolfolk. Bowser forgave Woolfolk and said he hoped to see the speculator in heaven. Woolfolk supposedly answered with an angry profanity and muttered that Bowser “was now going to get what he deserved, and he was glad of it.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Phillips, ed., *Plantation and Frontier Documents*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>30</sup> [Blane], *Excursion through the United States and Canada*, pp. 226-27.

<sup>31</sup> Undated New York *Christian Inquirer* as quoted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 2 Jan. 1827, pp. 109-10 (quotation); *Niles' Weekly Register*, 20 May

Three years later, slaves in the schooner *Lafayette* revolted and nearly took over the ship. It took the crew “considerable difficulty” to bolt the slaves to the deck until the ship docked in New Orleans, where one hundred of the bondservants were arrested.<sup>32</sup> That same year, Henry Gordon and two assistants escorted a coffle of about ninety slaves. Gordon, a speculator, had purchased the bondservants in Maryland and was on his way to Mississippi. As the coffle passed near Greenupsburg, Kentucky, one of the slaves used a file to free himself and the others around him, although they pretended to be in chains. On August 14, 1829, two of them dropped their shackles and started fighting. Just as one of the assistants rushed in with a whip to break up the altercation, the other slaves broke free. A bondservant bludgeoned one assistant to death while another slave shot the other escort. Next they turned their attention on Gordon. One rebel held the trader while another shot him twice, both bullets grazing his head. Having failed to execute the speculator, the slaves clubbed him several times and left him for dead. They took \$2,400 from Gordon’s trunk and rifled through his other possessions. During the looting, a female slave helped the trader mount his horse and flee. One of the slaves pursued the man, but was unable to overtake him. Gordon soon reached a plantation where he alerted the neighborhood to the danger.<sup>33</sup>

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1826, p. 262; Merton L. Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom* (Urbana, 1966), p. 118.

<sup>32</sup> *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 9 Sept. 1830, p. 328 (quotation); *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 1 Jan. 1830, p. 131.

<sup>33</sup> *Lexington Kentucky Reporter*, 9 Sept. 1829 as quoted in Coleman Papers; *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 5 Sept. 1829, pp. 18-19; Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky*, pp. 176-78.

A posse soon captured all of the slaves. Authorities arraigned seven of them on October 6 and a jury convicted six of them the next day. On November 20, the sheriff hanged five of them. Before the sentence was carried out, one of the men was said to have exclaimed, “death—death at any time, in preference to slavery.” Dinah, the other slave, was found to be “pregnant and quick with child” and asked her sentence be suspended until she could deliver the baby. The court granted her wish and waited until May 25, 1830 to execute her.<sup>34</sup> There is no record of what happened to Dinah’s child or the other slaves in the coffle, but presumably they all were subject to Gordon’s wishes since he had purchased them.<sup>35</sup>

The next year near Prince Edward Courthouse, Virginia, slaves murdered traders Jesse and John Kirby of Georgia. At least two bondservants attacked the men, cutting their throats and leaving one’s head “cleft open with an axe.” Seven of them fled with \$3,000 of the speculators’ money.<sup>36</sup> The rash of uprisings by slaves involved in the interstate trade died down in the 1830s, but one final event happened in late 1841.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 26 Dec. 1829, p. 277 (first quotation); Greenup County Circuit Court, Order Book H, October Term, 1829, pp. 158, 184-85, 196-97 (second quotation), April Term, 1830, p. 259, Kentucky State Library.

<sup>35</sup> David Walker mentioned the incident in his work and called the woman “deceitful and ignorant” (Herbert Aptheker, ed., *‘One Continual Cry,’ : David Walker’s Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, 1829-1830* (New York, 1965), pp. 34-35. See also Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, Penn., 1997), pp. 218-20).

<sup>36</sup> Undated *Farmville Chronicle*, as quoted in *Liberator*, 10 May 1831, p. 74.

<sup>37</sup> It could be, too, that incidents involving resistance against the interstate trade remained fairly constant. The reporting of them may have been silenced because of the perception that abolitionists would use such events as evidence of slavery’s brutality.

The *Creole*, a brig making its way from Richmond to New Orleans, carried one hundred and thirty five slaves owned by three different traders. The male slaves slept in the forward hold, while all but six of the women were confined aft. Those women were forced to stay in the cabin with the white crew and passengers. On November 7, 1841, a noisy disturbance in the hold broke out. When a crew member went to investigate, Madison Washington, a slave who had briefly escaped to freedom, rushed the hatch and led the slaves to the deck. They nearly decapitated one of the crew with a bowie knife and threw the man overboard. The rebels took the remainder of the crew hostage after badly injuring two of them in hand-to-hand fighting. Nineteen slaves, under Washington's leadership, took control of the ship and steered a course for the Bahamas. In two days the vessel reached Nassau and after much debate, the British allowed the slaves to remain on the island.<sup>38</sup> These unusual but memorable incidents reinforced the presumption that the slave trade could suddenly become extremely violent. While few slaves resorted to such drastic measures, those who did so became examples for southerners who alleged that speculators trafficked in dangerous or rebellious slaves. Northerners, particularly those who opposed slavery, also used such incidents as proof of slavery's barbarity.

Slaves used other methods to resist the trade. Some refused to submit to a sale and killed or maimed themselves or their family members. A Virginia slave who was

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<sup>38</sup> Niles' *National Register*, 22 Jan. 1842, pp. 323-26; New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, 24 Mar. 1842; Edward D. Jervay and C. Harold Huber, "The *Creole* Affair," *Journal of Negro History*, 65 (1980): 196-211; Howard Jones, "The Peculiar Institution and National Honor: The Case of the Creole Slave Revolt," *Civil War History*, 21 (1975): 28-50. An interview with Washington is found in Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony*, pp. 217-25.

sold “down the river” cut his throat instead of consenting to his sale.<sup>39</sup> In Loudoun County, Virginia, a slave owner told how one of his neighbors sold a slave family to a speculator. The owner sent the bondservants to a blacksmith’s shop on the pretense of running an errand, but had arranged for the trader to take possession of them at the shop. Although the speculator was able to capture the slaves, one of them committed suicide upon learning his fate.<sup>40</sup> A visitor to Virginia surmised that enough slaves there preferred to “suffer death than be separated from the objects of their affection” to concern slave owners.<sup>41</sup> In Baltimore, a slave cut his throat in public view on a wharf as he was boarding a ship for New Orleans, while a woman in Snow Hill, Maryland, killed her child and then herself when learning of her sale.<sup>42</sup> William Wells Brown described how a woman, after being taken from husband and children, and “having no desire to live without them, in the agony of her soul jumped overboard, and drowned herself.”<sup>43</sup>

Suicide and self-mutilation were unusual responses to a stressful situation. Most slaves, however, chose an alternate way of expressing their hostility to the interstate slave trade. One of the most common methods was running away once the slave

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<sup>39</sup> *Abolitionist Intelligencer and Missionary Magazine*, June 1822, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 29 Mar. 1828, p. 75.

<sup>41</sup> Abdy, *Journal of a Residence*, 3: 350 (quotation); Hodgson, *Remarks during a Journey*, p. 179.

<sup>42</sup> *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 21 July 1821, p. 324.

<sup>43</sup> Brown, *Narrative of William Wells Brown*, p. 40. Numerous other instances of violent slave resistance are reprinted in *Liberator*, 7 June 1834, p. 90.



learned of the sale. A Missouri slaveholder believed that “nothing but the fear of being sent to New Orleans” induced his slave to run away. When David Holmes learned of his impending sale, he asked for advice from other slaves and used the knowledge to escape. Moses Grandy’s mother hid her children in the woods “to prevent master from selling us.”<sup>44</sup> Other bondservants ran away when they thought a sale was imminent. Owners who feared that their slaves might take flight might sell them to a friend or neighbor rather than a slave trader. Benjamin Brand, for instance, refused to sell his slaves to a speculator because of the effect it would have on his other slaves. Even though he “overbid” to buy the bondservants, he offered them to a friend at cost. He knew that a slaveholder’s happiness “in great measure” depended “on the good character and disposition of his slaves.” Brand feared the rest of his slaves would resent the sale of their family and friends to a speculator. “I had much rather sell to you than let them go out of state,” he informed his colleague, so that the bondservants would remain in the area and pacify his remaining slaves. Owners in Maryland were known to sell slaves at a private sale rather than use a trader. Although the cash gain was lower, bondservants were less likely to run away when they heard of the sale. Masters, whether they used the interstate slave trade for punishment or avoided it for

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<sup>44</sup> St. Louis *Missouri Gazette & Public Advertiser*, 29 Mar. 1820, as quoted in Avarh Strickland, “Aspects of Slavery in Missouri, 1821,” *Missouri Historical Review* 65 (1971): 525 (first quotation); Grandy, *Narrative of the Life*, p. 5 (second quotation). For more examples of slaves who ran away when threatened with sale, see Moses Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, from American Slavery* (1838; reprint, New York, 1970), pp. 10-11; and Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony*, pp. 160, 252-53, 297-98 303-304.

humanitarian reasons, knew its power in slaves' lives.<sup>45</sup> David Smith, a slave in Baltimore, used a different method to resist his sale. He prayed. Smith figured that if God delivered him "from the corrupt influence of the world and the power of Satan," then God could deliver Smith from the speculator. His prayers were answered when his sister-in-law purchased Smith and manumitted him.<sup>46</sup> Other slaves petitioned local planters to buy them so that they would not fall into the hands of slave traders.<sup>47</sup>

Those slaves who protested their sale with suicide, flight, or even tears and screams influenced how others thought about the slave trade. In some cases, slaves were able to use the weight of negative public opinion or the implied threat of intractability to alter their situation. A Richmond trader complained that "I did intend to leave Nancy's child but she made such a damned fuss I had to let her take it."<sup>48</sup> The speculator might have wished to avoid making a public spectacle of the woman's sale and gave into her wishes so that she would be quiet. He may have also weighed the consequences of having a slave who was more trouble than she was worth. Other slaves unintentionally affected how outsiders viewed speculation. A slave trader purchased a young woman in Baltimore and prepared to put her on board a vessel for shipment to New Orleans. The woman carried a young child who had not been sold with her.

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<sup>45</sup> Benjamin Brand to Martin Dawson, 17 Mar. 1819, Benjamin Brand Papers, Virginia Historical Society (quotations); Whitman, *Price of Freedom*, p. 77; Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, pp. 45-54.

<sup>46</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, p. 311.

<sup>47</sup> Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*, p. 31.

<sup>48</sup> John W. Pittman to John B. Williamson, 26 May 1835, as quoted in Deyle, "Domestic Slave Trade, p. 231.

“When they reached the wharf, she sat down, unconscious of everything but the presence of her infant, upon whose face she continued to gaze, in apparent agony, while affording it nourishment for the last time from her breast.” When it came time to depart, her former master took the infant while the mother poured forth with “the most agonizing cries.” The bystanders were “deeply affected with pity for her” but realized there was no remedy. John Randolph had a similar experience. He said the greatest orator he ever heard was a woman. “She was a slave. She was a mother, and her rostrum was the auction block.”<sup>49</sup>

A more subtle form of resistance entailed slaves trying to shape the nature of their own sales. Bondservants in Charleston, for instance, contradicted an auctioneer’s description of them, protesting that they were not “likely” or “fine” but had assorted ailments instead. They did so, thought an observer, in order to lower the expectations of their buyers. “If sold at a high price, the negro knows he must make himself worth that price to his master by hard labor; if, on the contrary, at a low price, he can afford to be idle, and his master will not complain.” One slave in Maryland was “so afraid of being sold to some Georgian and took it in her head to make herself look bad. Finally, she made so many fine promises that she persuaded Ben Lowndes [a local resident] to buy her.”<sup>50</sup> Even slaves in the pens of the Lower South shaped the nature of their sales. Traders went to great lengths to make sure their bondservants looked happy, since

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<sup>49</sup> Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, p. 106 (first three quotations); Kirk, *John Randolph of Roanoke*, p. 147 (final quotation).

<sup>50</sup> N. S. Dodge, “A Charleston Vendue in 1842,” *Galaxy Magazine*, (1869): 121 (first quotation); Margaret Law Calcott, ed., *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert 1795-1821* (Baltimore, 1991), p. 55 (second quotation).

prospective buyers shied away from purchasing surly slaves. Theophilus Freeman had his assistant play music for his bondservants so they would dance and look happy.

William Wells Brown, an assistant to a trader, forced the slaves in a New Orleans pen to dance, jump, and sing. Even though some of the bondservants had tears running down their cheeks, the trader wanted to “make them appear cheerful and happy.”<sup>51</sup>

Just as prospective buyers examined slaves, the slaves sized up potential buyers. Many slaves contradicted the speculator’s instructions to look happy and content. One slave told to a potential purchaser that “You may buy me, for power is in your hands: — but I will never work for you.” John Parker explained that “I made up my mind I was going to select my owner so when any one came to inspect me I did not like, I answered all questions with a ‘yes’ and made myself disagreeable[.] So farr as I was concerned the game was on, and I began to play it.”<sup>52</sup> John Brown spent three months in a New Orleans slave pen. He quickly learned how slaves influenced their sales. Although slaves might be “physically faultless,” they could lower their value with “a sour look, or a dull, vacant stare, or a general dullness of demeanour.” These actions certainly influenced sales. David Campbell, looking for some slaves to buy, combed through speculators’ jails in New Orleans. He found an interesting slave, but declined to buy

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<sup>51</sup> Brown, *Narrative of William Wells Brown*, p. 46 (quotation); Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia*, p. 113.

<sup>52</sup> Abdy, *Journal of a Residence*, 3: 350 (first quotation); John Parker, as quoted in Leslie H. Owens, *This Species of Property: Slave Life and Culture in the Old South* (New York, 1976), p. 188 (second quotation). Abdy also reported that another slave said, “Buy me if you please; but I tell you openly, if I become your slave, I will cut your throat the first opportunity.” (Abdy, *Journal of a Residence*, 3: 350).

the man. "He seemed not unwilling for me to purchase him," Campbell explained to his wife, "but I apprehended he would immediately run away."<sup>53</sup>

Slaves also resisted by communicating their discontent to visitors. Ethan Allen Andrews toured the South to gain first-hand knowledge of slavery and the slave trade. He made sure to stop in Alexandria, Virginia, and visit the pen of the renowned Franklin and Armfield. After being entertained by the firm's junior partner, Andrews was escorted into the slave pen itself. There he saw the cells that housed the slaves. As Andrews waited, one of the firm's members forced the slaves out of their rooms and lined them up in the central courtyard. As the inspection progressed, with the males on one side and the females on the other, Armfield "was expatiating on their happy condition, when compared with that in which they had lived before they came to this place." The monologue, Andrews concluded, was "apparently intended for the joint benefit of the slaves and their northern visitor." He remained unconvinced after seeing a young slave with "an interesting and intelligent countenance." Whenever "the keeper turned away his face, he [the slave] shook his head, and seemed desirous of having me understand, that he did not feel any such happiness as was described, and that he dissented from the representation made of his condition."<sup>54</sup>

These slaves, and countless others like them, resisted slavery in a multitude of ways, from extreme violence to subtle psychological ploys. Even though slave resistance comprised an internal threat to the domestic slave trade, the efforts of the

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<sup>53</sup> Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia*, p. 98 (first and second quotations); David Campbell to Mary Campbell, 14 Feb. 1823, as quoted in Johnson, "Masters and Slaves," p. 182 (third quotation).

bondservants were not sufficient to halt an increasing acceptance of speculation. Slave attacks on traders and the mutinies on the seas did not occur with enough consistency to pose a real danger to slaveholders. Rebellion was a constant, underlying fear in the South, and resistance to slave traders was just part of the overall effort of slaves to test the limits of their enslavement. As we have seen, owners in the Upper South often viewed the internal slave trade as a public good since masters could dispose of unwanted slaves. The Lower South eventually was able to accept the massive importation of slaves, as long as enough safeguards were in place to control the location of sales and legislatures made half-hearted efforts to prevent the entry of criminal slaves. Masters, at times, perceived bondservants as an internal threat to the institution of slavery but were generally confident enough to believe they were in control. Less drastic acts of resistance were equally ineffective in persuading southern citizens that speculation should be abolished or even regulated. The constant exposure to the trade, in part, dulled consciences.

Although bondservants had limited impact on how southerners perceived the interstate slave trade, speculators were just the opposite. They ably facilitated the transition of the slave trade from something that was dubious to its central place in southern society. Speculators worked to overcome negative associations with the brutal elements of the trade—coffles, chains, jails, and armed guards. Northerners and foreigners visiting the South had extreme and negative reactions to such sights, and, as we have seen, some southerners were disgusted, as well. The slave trade was not just a matter of speculators making unreasonable demands upon slaves. Traders had to make

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<sup>54</sup> Ethan A. Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, pp. 136-38, quotation on p. 138.

some compromises with slaves—give them inducements to behave properly, for instance—but they also made crucial changes to their business so it would be more palatable for southerners. In essence, they tried to convince a skeptical public that the slave trade was beneficial to the South and that slaves were grateful for its existence. They systematized and regularized speculation even while softening some of its harsh features. Traders established routines and practices for the interstate slave trade that made it a normal and accepted feature in much of the South.

The establishment of permanent headquarters was one of speculators' early innovations. Private jails provided a measure of discretion and control for traders. They no longer had to rent space in taverns or city jails, a particularly odious practice in the Upper South. Slaves could wait for weeks in crowded jails, drawing significant protest from local citizens. The Grand Jury of Baltimore described the conditions in that city's public jail. Slaves were "crowded together, male and female in one common dungeon, there being loaded with irons, confined in their filth together." Such cruelty was "abhorrent to every principle of humanity" and "disgraceful to any civilized community."<sup>55</sup> Traders used their own jails to avoid such criticism. Because slave pens were an eyesore, the first ones were usually on the edge of town or outside the city limits so that they would draw a minimum of complaints.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> July Term of the Grand Jury of Baltimore, 1816, Select Committee...on the Illegal Traffic in Slaves. For similar protests, see undated Baltimore *American*, as quoted in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Mar. 1822, pp. 441-42; and Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>56</sup> That slave pens were on the edges of town, see pp. 48-49 of this study.

The advantages of having a permanent headquarters were numerous, but one of the most important was that it was a sign of good faith. Setting up a depot for the collection of slaves meant that traders could be easily located. Those who established jails signaled their intentions to be a consistent part of the community. Austin Woolfolk was apparently one of the first traders to use a permanent slave pen. He set up a private jail in Baltimore to hold his slaves until he was ready to ship them to New Orleans. In 1823 Woolfolk established a private jail at his residence near the Three Ton Tavern on Pratt Street in Baltimore.<sup>57</sup> Other speculators, too, incorporated private pens into their operations and slave jails became a consistent feature in the larger towns of the Upper South. By 1830 slave pens had gained enough notoriety that they became a tourist attraction for curious foreigners and opponents of slavery who wanted to examine them firsthand.<sup>58</sup>

The movement of slaves out of public places and into private jails enabled speculators to conceal the worst sights and glaring abuses of the slave trade, thus making it more palatable to southerners. Private pens allowed traders to move their coffles at night, since they were not dependent on the schedule of the local sheriff. Many speculators made it a habit to start their southward trek long after most people were in bed. Woolfolk, who transported most of his slaves in the coastwise trade,

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<sup>57</sup> Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, p. 80; *Baltimore American*, 11 Aug., 12 Dec. 1823, 9 Apr. 1824.

<sup>58</sup> Visits to Franklin or Armfield's slave jail in Alexandria, for instance, are found in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Mar. 1834, pp. 39-40; Abdy, *Journal of a Residence*, 2: 179-80; Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, pp. 135-143; and Joseph Sturge, *A Visit to the United States in 1841* (London, 1842), p. 85.



waited until after dusk to move his bondservants from his pen to the ship. He kept his slaves in his jail until he had enough for a shipment and then brought them to the vessel in a group. Woolfolk did so “usually at night” so that Baltimore’s residents would not be exposed to the horror of coffles.<sup>59</sup> He was not the only trader to hide the seamier side of speculation. The other Baltimore traders did their work so well that, according to a group opposed to slavery, it was difficult to obtain “details” of the domestic slave trade. Its “operations are in some degree concealed from the public eye. The trade is not a clandestine one, but being offensive to the feelings of a large portion of the community, it is in great measure withdrawn from public observation.” Likewise, in the nation’s capital speculation was often concealed from the public. J. M. McKim visited slave jails in the District of Columbia and found out to his “horror” that the slaves were “awakened *at night* to set out on their southern journey.” McKim thought this fact “curious” and could not account for it.<sup>60</sup> Theodore Parker, in an article that castigated the slave trade, wrote that droves of slaves were a common sight in the city’s streets. Joseph Allen disagreed. The long-time resident of Washington informed Parker that some people lived in the city for thirty or forty years without seeing one coffle.<sup>61</sup> That

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<sup>59</sup> Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, p. 80 (quotation); *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 2 Jan. 1827, p. 109; *Liberator*, 5 Mar. 1836, p. 61.

<sup>60</sup> Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, p. 80 (first and second quotations); *Liberator*, 20 Apr. 1838 (remaining quotations, emphasis in original). One slave recalled that traders in St. Louis drove their slaves to the boats at four o’clock Sunday morning because “Public sentiment eventually turned against that sort of thing” and “nobody was stirring” at that time of day (Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony*, p. 504). This proclivity to nighttime activity also made it difficult to estimate the trade’s volume.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Allen to Theodore Parker, 25 Jan. 1848, Theodore Parker Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

Allen could report that District residents were spared the sight of coffles is testament to traders' stealth. This movement of slaves at night could be a boon to those speculators who sold persons who had been kidnapped. These traders "hurried [free persons] off in the night" in the midst of slave coffles so that the victims could not protest to any spectators.<sup>62</sup>

Just as traders hid the objectionable sight of coffles from the public, they also tried to dissociate themselves from competitors who engaged in questionable business practices. Woolfolk worked hard to establish a reputation for fair business dealings. A critic of slavery admitted that Woolfolk conducted himself so that there was "never any suspicion of unfairness" in his mode of acquiring slaves.<sup>63</sup> Men who stayed in the trade for any length of time knew that they could not get away with shady dealings for long. Bacon Tait, an established speculator, advised George Kephart, who was just entering the business as one of Franklin and Armfield's agents, that "Trash and defective" slaves were "never permanently profitable." Tait drew a sharp contrast between short-term profits and long-term results. In advising Kephart to avoid questionable slaves, he noted that even if they are "frequently sold at a profit for the time being," such "sales often recoil upon the vendor, with detriment more than counter-balancing such profit."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Deposition of Francis Scott Key, 22 Apr. 1816, Select Committee...on the Illegal Traffic in Slaves. Jesse Torrey, when gathering information for his book, questioned slaves in coffles while they marched through the streets of Washington. One prisoner said the slave trader beat him for saying he was free. Torrey's actions, and those of other abolitionists, were another reason traders shielded their coffles from public view (Jesse Torrey to John Randolph, 29 Apr. 1816, *Ibid.*).

<sup>63</sup> Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, p. 80.

<sup>64</sup> Conway, *Testimonies Concerning Slavery*, p. 22.

Equally important for increasing slave trading's acceptance was educating the public about its utility. The steady stream of visitors to Franklin and Armfield's pen in Alexandria provided the firm with the opportunity to proselytize the unbeliever. Since Franklin handled business in New Orleans and Natchez, Armfield did most of the entertaining in Alexandria. He never missed an opportunity to instruct his guests on speculation's goodness and was the perfect advocate for the interstate slave trade. Armfield used his "fine personal appearance" and "engaging and graceful manners" to win over skeptics.<sup>65</sup> Visitors to the firm's slave pen in Alexandria were treated to a spectacle unlike anything they associated with a slave jail. The serious and the curious waited in a "well-furnished room" where they could sip wine.<sup>66</sup> After a few pleasantries, which one guest thought was a way to buy time for workers to clean up the facility, visitors entered the jail itself where numerous rooms held the slaves. All the rooms were clean and had fires to warm the slaves. Armfield's intent was to demonstrate how humane the slave trade could be and that speculators were unlike their reputation. He strove to persuade skeptics that he, and by implication, other traders treated slaves with a modicum of decency. Franklin rivaled his junior partner in presenting the best possible interpretation of a dreadful business. A visitor to Franklin's office in Natchez could not quite comprehend what he saw. He described the slave

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<sup>65</sup> Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, p. 136.

<sup>66</sup> Abdy, *Journal of a Residence*, 2: 179. Serving wine might have been commonplace. Walker, a slave trader who transported slaves from St. Louis to New Orleans, "kept wines in his room, for the accommodation of those who called to negotiate with him for the purchase of slaves." (Brown, *Narrative of William Wells Brown*, p. 53). The wine was probably used as a lubricant to separate purchasers from their money.

trader as a “man of gentlemanly address.” Franklin and the city’s other slave traders were “not the ferocious, Captain Kidd looking fellows” he had imagined.<sup>67</sup>

While visitors sat in the parlors of slave pens and sipped wine, the speculators had ample opportunity to review the benefits of their business. Traders actively sought to repair their damaged reputations. One strategy was to promote the idea that they did the South a favor by removing some troublesome slaves. Such an idea had its limits, of course, since these slaves had to go somewhere and those states that imported them sometimes felt as though they were dumping grounds for malcontents.<sup>68</sup> Woolfolk, for instance, “talks much (and procures others to talk for him) of the propriety of removing the ‘bad’ slaves” from Maryland.<sup>69</sup> His public relations offensive apparently won at least one convert, as an incident with Benjamin Lundy demonstrates. Lundy, an agitator for the abolition of slavery, published one of the earliest periodicals dedicated to the overthrow of the peculiar institution, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*. Although he began publication in Greenville, Tennessee, he moved his operation to Baltimore to expand his readership and influence. Once in Baltimore, Lundy came across Woolfolk and was chagrined at the quick growth of his slave trading operations. Lundy was not convinced by the trader’s talk and blasted him as a “monster in human shape” and a “soul seller.” The thin-skinned Woolfolk detested the descriptions because, besides being personal insults, they associated him with the worst portions of

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<sup>67</sup> Ingraham, *South-West by a Yankee*, 2: 245.

<sup>68</sup> For more on the efforts of the Lower South to cope with the slave trade through the use of importation bans, see Chapter Four of this study.

<sup>69</sup> *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 26 Aug. 1826, p. 406.

the trade. When the two men met on a Baltimore street in 1827, their encounter quickly degenerated into an argument and a shoving match. Woolfolk threw the much smaller Lundy to the ground and beat him about the head before several bystanders intervened. Lundy charged Woolfolk with assault, to which the trader pleaded guilty. The judge found Lundy's extreme rhetoric distasteful and ruled that he provoked Woolfolk with abusive language. In issuing a one dollar fine, the judge called the interstate slave trade an economic benefit to Maryland that "removed a great many rogues and vagabonds who were a nuisance in the state."<sup>70</sup>

Even as Woolfolk aggressively defended himself, Armfield calmly handled all challenges to his character and business practices. An English visitor, concerned about the mistreatment and physical abuse of slaves, bluntly asked about the methods of discipline employed in the jail. Armfield assured him that there was no dungeon or thumbscrews in his slave pen.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, Slatter, when challenged about the evil consequences of the slave trade, replied that the law permitted speculation. He added that he was willing "to have the system abolished" if suitably compensated for his loss. Besides, Slatter, concluded correctly, "dealing in slaves was not worse than

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 20 Jan., pp. 25-26, 24 Feb., pp. 142-43, 31 Mar. 1827, p. 174; Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy*, pp. 104-20; Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison & the Abolition of Slavery* (New York, 1998), p. 76; Calderhead, "Role of the Professional Slave Trader," pp. 205-6. The judge specifically defined the terms "slave trader" and "soul seller" as offensive.

<sup>71</sup> Abdy, *Journal of a Residence*, 2: 180. Although Armfield may have answered the question literally, it is clear that slave traders used various methods of physical punishment to coerce slaves (Fredrika Bremer, *Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, translated by Mary Howitt, 2 vol. (New York, 1854), 2: 533-35).

slaveholding.”<sup>72</sup> These traders were able to present the slave trade in a positive light. Rather than being roughnecks on horseback who escorted gangs of shackled slaves, they were sophisticated professionals who performed a vital service.

The context in which a person encountered a slave trader, moreover, made a difference. George Featherstonhaugh traveled across the United States and met a man he described as using a “farrago of bad grammar.” The individual was a “compound of everything vulgar and revolting, and totally without education.” When the man left, Featherstonhaugh asked his stagecoach driver about the barbarian. The driver responded that it was John Armfield, the celebrated slave trader. Featherstonhaugh concluded that Armfield’s “abominable vocation” was the key to his manners and expressions.<sup>73</sup> His extremely negative portrayal of Armfield was in stark contrast to the impressions of the visitors to Franklin and Armfield’s slave pen. Featherstonhaugh had recently encountered his first slave coffle and was certainly no friend of slavery. Many of those who praised Armfield, however, were also abolitionists who had no reason to find good qualities in the man. The primary difference was the context in which Armfield appeared. In his slave pen he was able to pose as a charming and suave gentleman. On the road, since Featherstonhaugh immediately associated Armfield with a slave coffle, he seemed to be rude, uncivilized, and totally devoid of all honor. As we have seen, the larger traders employed agents to handle the nastier portions of the business. In doing so, men like Woolfolk, Franklin, and Armfield could appear to be

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<sup>72</sup> Sturge, *Visit to the United States*, pp. 31-32. Sturge misspelled the trader’s name “Slaughter.”

<sup>73</sup> Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion through the Slave States*, p. 46.

untainted by the trade's excesses. Agents, while necessary for business, also served as a layer of protection from specific objections to the trade.<sup>74</sup>

Theodore Dwight Weld was one person who looked at slavery from the outside and was perceptive enough to realize that there was a gulf between an established slave trader and one who was an agent or an itinerant dealer. Weld mocked this idea, though, for he thought slavery indelibly stained all who touched it. He noticed how "some 'gentleman of property and standing' and of a 'good family' embarks in a negro speculation, and employs a dozen 'soul drivers' to traverse the upper country, and drive to the south coffles of slaves." Even though such a person might expend hundreds of thousands of dollars he did not "lose caste." Weld listed several prominent southerners connected with the slave trade, noting that a member of the Kentucky Senate accompanied a coffe, "Not as the *driver*, for that would be vulgar drudgery, beneath a gentleman, but as a nabob in state, ordering his understrappers." Weld sarcastically added that the "wholesale soul-seller doubtless despises the retail 'soul-drivers' who give him their custom."<sup>75</sup> Even though Weld mocked the idea that there was any difference between slave traders, he recognized that many southerners ascribed to the belief. He was familiar enough with slavery to know that speculators used various methods to put some distance between themselves and the trade.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Armfield was probably less circumspect about his behavior out on the road because he assumed he was not influencing an opponent of slavery

<sup>75</sup> Weld, *American Slavery as It Is*, p. 174. Emphasis in original.

<sup>76</sup> Evans, "Domestic Slave Trade," pp. 329-37 divides traders into three economic classes based on the volume of their business. He makes no distinctions, however, between itinerant traders, agents, and established speculators.

Weld elaborated on his theory a few years later when he collaborated with James Thome on another attack on slavery. This time he pointed out the difference between soul-drivers, slave traders, and speculators. Weld placed them into two classes, one of which had the large “factories” in Alexandria, Baltimore, Norfolk, Richmond, and Petersburg. Traders who stayed at their headquarters and sent out agents to gather slaves could put a kindly façade on their involvement in the inhuman portions of speculation. These men of large capital “conduct the traffic on the broadest scale. They hold an honorable rank among the heavy capitalists and extensive merchants of our southern cities, and move in the highest social circles.” The other class of slave traders consisted of the “agents and pimps” of the first group. They were “constantly scouring the breeding states” for slaves to put on ships or in coffles. Those who bought up “small gangs and drive their own coffles” were also in this category. Such men were “doubtless horribly base wretches of vile origin, and viler lives.”<sup>77</sup> Speculators like Franklin, Armfield, and Woolfolk could be accepted in southern society because they did not *appear* to be slave traders. They seemed to be professionals who merely facilitated the transfer of slaves from one individual to another. It was the use of agents or employees of such men who suffered the indignities associated with being labeled a trader.

Besides conducting a public relations campaign and using agents as a buffer from criticism, the large traders also tried to distance themselves from the illegal

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<sup>77</sup> Weld and Thome, *Slavery and the Internal Slave Trade*, pp. 67-68. The relationship between a slave trader and his agent is found in Edmund L. Drago, ed., *Broke by the War: Letters of a Slave Trader* (Columbia, S. C., 1991).



kidnapping of slaves. Joshua Leavitt, who campaigned actively against slavery, visited Franklin and Armfield's pen in an effort to study the slave trade firsthand. He asked Armfield if any slaves were kidnapped. Leavitt likely hoped to amass ammunition for use in attacking slavery and the interstate trade. Armfield was too clever to fall into the trap, so he did not deny that abductions happened. He quickly pointed out that every business was "cursed with mean fellows," subtly distancing himself from the illegal portion of the trade. Armfield went on to assure his visitor that he had done "all in his power to prevent such things." He explained that he and Franklin conducted their business affairs "in such a way that gentlemen who traded with their house should always know whom they dealt with." Leavitt then tried to ambush Armfield by producing evidence that two men on one of the firm's ships had been sold improperly. Although he must have been shocked, Armfield kept his composure. Such a predicament might have undermined the trader's claim to strict business practices against buying kidnapped slaves. In looking closely at the matter, Armfield admitted a mistake in the purchase of the men, took them off the ship, and sent them back to Maryland. Leavitt may have found evidence for his accusations, but Armfield successfully defended his personal probity. The speculator was willing to sacrifice the profit on two men to preserve the firm's reputation.<sup>78</sup>

Armfield was not the only slave trader who claimed he prevented the kidnapping of slaves. Woolfolk reputedly turned in traders who bought kidnapped slaves.<sup>79</sup> Two

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<sup>78</sup> *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Mar. 1834, pp. 39-41.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 Aug. 1826, p. 406.

visitors to Hope Slatter's slave pen in Baltimore brought an individual "who has often been engaged in preventing negroes from being illegally enslaved." Slatter heartily endorsed the man's activities. The guests then confronted Slatter about two of his slaves who were actually free men. When challenged about their status, he swore out a complaint against the sellers and had the men released. Slatter, being a savvy businessman, hoped to insulate himself from the suspicion of illegal activity while also trying to get his money back from a fraudulent sale.<sup>80</sup> James McFall tried to separate himself from any association with the kidnapping trade when he advertised that all his sales were "executed conformable to law, accompanied with *legal vouchers, guarantees, &c.*" Likewise, Samuel Dawson would buy only slaves of "sound Property and good titles."<sup>81</sup> Advertisements of this nature served two purposes. They deterred shady transactions even while being an effective means of public relations. Whether or not speculators actually intended to adhere to their promises was questionable. They did, however, want to convince a skeptical public that they would.

Another way traders restored their tarnished image was to pretend to keep slave families together. Armfield patiently explained to his guests that his firm went to great pains to prevent family separations. Slatter also tried to convince people that he did not break families apart. He made the fanciful claim that slaves came to him and asked to

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<sup>80</sup> Sturge, *Visit to the United States*, p. 31 (quotation); Undated *Baltimore Sun*, as quoted in *Liberator*, 17 Nov. 1837, p. 185.

<sup>81</sup> New Orleans *Louisiana Advertiser*, 10 Jan. 1834 (first quotation, emphasis in original); Fredericksburg *Virginia Herald*, 19 Apr. 1826 (second quotation). See also the advertisements of Davis and Kincaid (*Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 7 May 1816) and Joseph Meek (*Baltimore American*, 14 June 1825).

be purchased so that they could go to a good master who would respect the integrity of their family. Slatter told visitors that slaves in his care were “treated kindly.”<sup>82</sup> Stories circulated that Woolfolk’s slaves gathered around him in a display of affection “and even the little children manifest the most eager solicitude to share in his affections.” Such an attitude on the part of slaves would have shocked Frederick Douglass had it been true. He equated all slave traders with the name Woolfolk and being sold to Woolfolk was equivalent to a death sentence.<sup>83</sup>

Although much of traders’ pontifications were probably not based on reality, it appears that Franklin and Armfield changed their buying practices. Statistical evidence shows that Armfield, who handled the purchases in Alexandria, bought more slaves in family units after 1834. The percentage of slaves in family units rose from just over seven percent in 1828-29 to nearly ten times that figure in 1835.<sup>84</sup> Armfield explained the reasons for the change to Leavitt. The speculator said he recently purchased about twenty children who were under ten years of age. He bought them all from one estate and pledged to keep them together. Armfield tried to convince his visitor “they were

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<sup>82</sup> Sturge, *Visit to the United States*, p. 31 (quotation); Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, p. 139.

<sup>83</sup> Andrews, *Domestic Slave-Trade*, p. 81 (quotation); Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass*, p. 76.

<sup>84</sup> Sweig, “Northern Virginia Slavery,” pp. 220-23; Donald M. Sweig, “Reassessing the Human Dimensions of the Interstate Slave Trade,” *Prologue*, 12 (1980): 5-21. The actual figures are 1828-29: 7.26%; 1832-33: 13.5%; 1835: 69%; 1836: 49%. Although it is true the percentage of family slaves decreased in 1836, Armfield’s purchasing pattern was still significantly different than six years previous. That he and Franklin sold the business in 1836 may have accounted for some of the change.

more valuable in consequence of their being acquainted, and would fetch a higher price in market to sell them all together.” In reality, the value of slaves dropped if they were sold in family units because purchasers frequently had to buy slaves they did not want and were able to negotiate a lower price.<sup>85</sup> Thus, on the face of it, Armfield was deceiving his visitor. He recognized the long-term benefit of persuading the public of his good intentions. Once word spread that Franklin and Armfield bought slave families, they would be in a better position to bargain with planters who were reluctant to part with their slaves for fear they were exiling the bondservants to a fate worse than death. Armfield told Leavitt he “never” sold slaves “so as to separate husband and wife, or mother and child.” He neglected to mention that his partner normally handled the sales, so the number of slaves he actually sold was negligible. Armfield, as the director of the firm’s slave buying efforts in the Chesapeake, was able to put enough distance between himself and speculation that his reputation remained intact. His firm’s shift to the purchase of slaves in family units was intended, moreover, to forestall abolitionist criticism of the slave trade in general and disapproval of their operations in particular. Abolitionists seized upon the ravages to the slave family as indicative of slavery’s brutality. Armfield responded by deliberately changing tactics in an effort to squelch such protests.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Mar. 1834, p. 39 (quotation); Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 52-55.

<sup>86</sup> *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Mar. 1834, p. 39. What was true for Armfield held for the rest of the trade, as well. Even though a trader bought slaves in family units there was no guarantee he would sell them in the same fashion. The subject of abolitionist criticism of the interstate slave trade will be addressed in the next chapter.

Traders like Armfield worked hard to dissociate themselves from their reputation for destroying slave families. In the process they de-emphasized the speculative aspects of the slave trade. For instance, an anonymous advertiser in a Richmond paper promised to pay a higher price for slaves “that have been raised together on one farm, as they are not wanted for speculation.”<sup>87</sup> The intention here was to spend a little more money to buy slaves in families and keep them together rather than use them for speculative gain. Traders tried to tap into this sentiment. Edwin Lee, a well-known trader in Norfolk, advertised that he wanted to buy ten to fifteen “likely young NEGROES, of good character” for an estate in the Southwest.<sup>88</sup> Abner Robinson tried the same tactic, advertising in Richmond for forty to sixty slaves. They were for a New Orleans resident who wanted them “for his own use,” with Robinson adding that “Satisfactory assurance can be given, that they will not be bought for re-sale.”<sup>89</sup> This strategy of arranging sales for a specific buyer, whether it be genuine or not, enabled speculators to pose as brokers. The very fact that traders mentioned the particular circumstances surrounding a purchase such as this indicates that they assumed it would give them an edge in the highly competitive world of slave buying. Instead of wantonly purchasing slaves, they could be viewed as arranging a sale with the goal of satisfying a specific individual rather than speculating on the price of bondservants. Traders who used this tactic hoped that owners who might not normally deal with them would be

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<sup>87</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, 12 July 1825.

<sup>88</sup> *Norfolk American Beacon*, 30 Mar. 1820. Lee had a similar advertisement in the 8 Jan. 1820 issue of the same paper.

<sup>89</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, 10 Dec. 1831.

persuaded to part with their slaves if they knew the bondservants were going to a specific owner rather than out on the speculative market.<sup>90</sup>

Slave traders went to extreme lengths to prove they did not separate families. When Joseph Ingraham visited a slave pen in Natchez, a planter offered a high price for a slave girl but did not want to purchase her sister. The trader refused to make the sale because, as he explained, “they are much attached to each other, and when their mother died I promised her I would not part them.”<sup>91</sup> It is likely the speculator was playing the part of a benevolent despot rather than truly seeking to honor a pledge he made to the mother. The thought of a trader actually refusing money because of a promise made to a deceased slave was ludicrous. What was most important to him in this instance was the appearance of preserving families. He probably hoped his visitor would make favorable comments about the slave market. Once the northern visitor left, there would be ample time to find buyers for the two girls. Some traders seemed to have sensed that they could not convince a skeptical public they kept families together. One left himself a way out of his contention that he preserved slave ties. He often severed family ties because “his business is to purchase, and he must take such as are in the market!” In other words, forces beyond his control were to blame for family separations.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> For more examples, see *Baltimore American*, 12 Sept. 1815, 20 Feb., 7 Sept., 9 Sept., 25 Sept. 1822, 9 Nov. 1824; *Easton Republican Star*, 18 May 1824; and *Princess Anne Village Herald*, 14 Sept. 1830, as quoted in Bancroft, *Slave Trading*, p. 32.

<sup>91</sup> Ingraham, *South-West by a Yankee*, 2: 203. The incident was also recounted in Winfield H. Collins, *The Domestic Slave Trade of the Southern States* (New York, 1904), p. 104.

<sup>92</sup> *Liberator*, 5 Mar. 1836, p. 39.

Traders like Armfield, Franklin, Woolfolk, and Slatter tried to put the best face possible on a sickening business. Slatter, for instance, bragged that he “frequently” left his slave pen for weeks under the care of his head slave, whose wife Slatter liberated some years earlier. The trader promised the same favor for the man if he conducted himself well.<sup>93</sup> One writer grew so weary of speculators proclaiming their virtue that he mocked their false sensitivity to the slaves. When he read that a man sent \$16,000 worth of slaves to Liberia he could hardly believe his eyes. “Were I not informed of its authenticity, I should fancy that this story was fabricated by some pious negro-seller on [the] James River.” It was there, he said sarcastically, that “humane breeders” send “eight thousand black cattle” annually out of the state.<sup>94</sup> Lundy, too, commented on the pervasiveness of the slave traders’ posturing. In examining Woolfolk’s tactics he deduced that “*the current of public sentiment is settling strongly against a toleration of the abominable business in which he is engaged, and that a great majority of the Baltimoreans look upon it with horror.*” Woolfolk, though, deliberately put on “the guise of humanity” and pretended to be “a great stickler for fair and *legal* dealing.” Some of his tricks included turning in kidnappers, courting the favor of slavery opponents, and treating his “*stall-fed*” slaves “pretty well.” By these means, “he effectually dupes many unsuspecting persons.”<sup>95</sup> On another occasion, Lundy deplored

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<sup>93</sup> Sturge, *Visit to the United States*, p. 31.

<sup>94</sup> *Western Luminary*, 19 Jan. 1831, p. 322.

<sup>95</sup> *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 26 Aug. 1826, p. 406 (quotations, emphasis in original); Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy*, pp. 34-54.

Woolfolk's "despicable canting" and mocked the speculator's "sham '*humanity*.'"<sup>96</sup>

Woolfolk and other slave traders realized that since they were in an objectionable business, and one that relied on the good faith of the seller for high profits, they must work for the esteem of the community. By turning in kidnappers, traders separated themselves from illegal activity and, by extension, established their personal honesty. A few noteworthy and well publicized incidents went a long way towards reducing hostility towards the trade.

Despite the efforts of speculators, being labeled a slave trader was still a powerful insult. The term "slave trader" and "soul seller" were associated with the objectionable aspects of the trade closely enough that members of polite society did not want to endure such abuse. That idea gained influence in the campaign preceding the presidential election of 1828. The widening circle of eligible voters opened the door to more sensational methods of influencing public opinion. Instead of addressing genteel arguments to a few voters, newspaper editors made wide ranging ad hominem arguments to stir up interest in the election. That year's contest proved to be one of the dirtiest on record, with Andrew Jackson's supporters accusing John Quincy Adams of installing a billiard table in the White House, being an aristocrat, and pimping for the Russian tsar. Adams's supporters responded by calling Jackson a "vain ignorant old man, a duellist, murderer, traitor, or traitor's traitor, cruel negro-trader, villainous intriguer, liar, scoundrel, blasphemer, + what not."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 2 Jan. 1827, p. 109. Emphasis in original.

<sup>97</sup> A. W. Putnam to Peter Force, 14 Sept. 1828, in Emil Edward Hurja Collection, Peter Force Materials, Box 8, Folder 25, Tennessee State Library and



It was Andrew Erwin, a long-time opponent of Jackson, who accused Old Hickory of being a slave trader. Erwin teamed with Boyd McNairy to charge Jackson with “buying and selling slaves for profit” in 1811.<sup>98</sup> The circumstances surrounding the incident are murky, but what is clear is that Jackson entered into a partnership with Horace Green and Joseph Coleman. The three men intended to make some quick money by transporting commodities from Nashville to Natchez. In 1810 they profited from the sale of cotton and tobacco and then bought slaves from Richard Epperson the next year.<sup>99</sup> This transaction only came to light because McNairy, a candidate for elector in Tennessee, acquired several of Jackson’s bank books and released their contents. These documents revealed that Coleman, Green, and Jackson paid \$10,500 for the slaves, \$2,050 of which was paid immediately with \$4,000 payable in two six-month installments. The crux of the dispute centered around the precise nature of Jackson’s involvement in the speculation. His defenders claimed he had no knowledge of the slave purchase, never intended to speculate on any bondservants, and served only as security in case Coleman and Green defaulted on their payments. They pointed to the fact that he was listed last in paperwork as proof of his tertiary involvement.

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Archives. For background on the election, see Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom, 1822-1832* (New York, 1981), pp. 116-42; Sellers, *Market Revolution*, p. 298; and Norma Basch, “Marriage, Morals, and Politics in the Election of 1828,” *Journal of American History*, 80 (1993): 890-918.

<sup>98</sup> *National Journal*, May 1828, as quoted in Abdy, *Journal of a Residence*, 2: 153-54. Abdy also quoted a similar charge printed in the *Nashville Banner*. Erwin claimed he was only responding in kind to “an unprovoked and villainous attack” made against him and his son for smuggling slaves into Georgia and then perjuring themselves in a cover-up (*National Banner and Nashville Whig*, 25 July 1828).

<sup>99</sup> The sources also use the spellings “Greene” and “Apperson.”

Jackson's opponents scoffed at that defense. They accused him of buying out the interest of Coleman and Green so that he could take sole possession of the slaves and pocket all the profits. In either case, Jackson became responsible for the entire debt. He traveled to "the lower country" to get the slaves and brought them back to Nashville so that he could pay off the loan.<sup>100</sup>

The charges and counter-charges slowly made their way into the publications of the day and the rhetoric portrayed slave traders in a revealing light. Jackson's opponents felt that his actions disqualified him from the nation's highest office. Erwin accused Jackson of dissembling in an attempt to avoid being imputed "the character of a negro trader." He connected speculation in slaves with other immoral activities such as slander, hypocritical behavior, disrespect for the law, torture of slaves, and prevarication.<sup>101</sup> In appealing to the "public morals" of the nation, the Frederick, Maryland, *Political Examiner* felt Jackson "disgraced himself" because he was seen with a "drove of negroes." Any man who would "trade in *human flesh* for gain" could

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<sup>100</sup> The information for this and following paragraphs is taken from [Andrew Erwin], *A Brief Account of General Jackson's Dealings in Negroes, in a Series of Letters and Documents by his own Neighbors* (n.p., n.d.); [Andrew Erwin], *General Jackson's Negro Speculations, and his traffics in Human Flesh, examined and established by Positive Proof* (n.p., n.d.); [Andrew Erwin], *Supplement to Andrew Jackson's Negro Speculations* (n.p., n.d.); *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, 5 Aug. 1828 (quotation); *Nashville Republican and State Gazette*, 8 Aug. 1828; Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, pp. 162-64; and James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (Boston, 1866) 1: 353-60.

<sup>101</sup> [Erwin], *Brief Account*, pp. 15-18, (quotation on p. 17); [Erwin], *Supplement*, pp. 1-8.

not be trusted.<sup>102</sup> It was the deliberate speculation that was so objectionable. If Jackson would exploit the slaves without a second thought, then he was unfit to govern. These charges were closely related to the belief that Jackson was a tyrant who could not be trusted with the reins of government. His activities towards his slaves were reprehensible and led him to believe he could do as he pleased without fear of consequence. The cover of Erwin's pamphlet made this idea explicit. It showed Jackson, in his military uniform beating a slave with a stick, while other slaves were being led away in a coffin.<sup>103</sup>

Jackson's defenders were dismayed that he was becoming known as a "negro trader." The charge was an "infamous falsehood" and an "odious" accusation made for purely political purposes, according to the *Nashville Republican and State Gazette*. Jackson had no choice but to go to Natchez to get the slaves because, being an honorable man, he wanted to pay his debts. He did so out of compulsion and "not with a view of *profit*."<sup>104</sup> The paper made a distinction that most southerners would have understood: Jackson did not act from motives of profit, but rather he defended his reputation and his honor. The difference between a private citizen and a slave trader was that the former could claim to act out of just motives whereas the latter was acting from selfishness and the love of money. "Wilberforce" made this distinction even

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<sup>102</sup> Undated Frederick, Maryland, *Political Examiner*, as reprinted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 21 June 1828, p. 139. Emphasis in original.

<sup>103</sup> [Erwin], *Brief Account*, cover. Erwin also charged Jackson and his nephew Andrew Hutchins with selling a slave boy in the "lower country" in 1805 (*Ibid.*, pp. 16-17).

<sup>104</sup> *Nashville Republican and State Gazette*, 8 Aug. 1828. Emphasis in original.

clearer in his defense of Jackson. He noted that the “serious” charge of slave trading came late in the election so that a full refutation of it would be difficult. This accusation was “justly odious” and entailed more than the “mere owning and employing of slaves.” Anyone who would destroy bondservants’ lives in order to profit from the master-slave relationship was a “monster in human shape.”<sup>105</sup> Jackson, whose slaves “venerated and almost idolized” him, never “made it his business to deal personally in negroes for his own individual profit.” Instead of selling the slaves in a “distant market,” Jackson brought them back to Nashville where they “would be more kindly treated.” Wilberforce thought the slaves would eventually be sold, it was just a matter of “whether they should be bought by those who would treat them kindly, or be left to the mercy of some professed and hardened dealer in human flesh.”<sup>106</sup> Jackson, in other words, was doing the slaves a favor by shielding them from the whims of speculation. Wilberforce successfully used the stereotype of the trader to defend Jackson by turning the argument inside out. If Old Hickory intended to speculate in slaves, then he would have kept them in Natchez and sold them there. That Jackson escorted the bondservants back to Nashville was convincing evidence that he spared them from the degradation of the slave market and that he acted from pure motives. Instead of being the wicked slave trader, Jackson was a hero because he rescued the bondservants from being sold down the river.

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<sup>105</sup> *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, 5 Aug. 1828. Wilberforce borrowed Lundy’s characterization of Woolfolk.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* Other writers defended Jackson in the *Lexington Kentucky Gazette*, 29 Aug., 7 Nov. 1828; and *Lexington Kentucky Reporter*, 1 Oct. 1828.

Most people sided with Wilberforce. In a particularly nasty campaign, it was easy to spot the political attacks. Most voters realized that Erwin timed his attack to coincide with the Kentucky elections and intended to injure Jackson's reputation. Old Hickory did not become known as a slave trader because most people thought he was selling the slaves from personal rather than speculative motives. It made no sense for a professional slave trader to bring the slaves from Natchez to Nashville. Had Jackson wanted to obtain the best price for the slaves, he would have sold them in Natchez.<sup>107</sup> One of Jackson's strong supporters in Mississippi wrote his colleague in Washington that those with "reasonable minds" knew that there was not enough evidence to make the allegations stick. "[P]roof after proof; unimpeachable witnesses, his letters, books &c., &c." will make sure that the charge will have "no effect *here*." He acknowledged, however, that the accusations "must strike a death blow to his prospects among the

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<sup>107</sup> *Raleigh Star and North Carolina State Gazette*, 4 Sept. 1828; *Natchez Ariel*, 10 May 1828. The latter publication asserted that it was Jackson's violent and arbitrary nature rather than the bogus charge of slave trading that should disqualify him from the presidency. The *Woodville Republican*, 28 Oct. 1828, reprinted an editorial about the charges against Jackson. "'Mr. Clay, Mr. Clay,' cries out two fisted Uncle Toby, 'Jackson's a coming – Jackson's a coming.' 'Well then,' says Clay, '*anti-tariff* him in the Journal.' 'I have, but he wont *stay* anti-tariffed.' 'Mr. Clay, Mr. Clay,' bawls out Alderman Binns, 'the old farmer's a coming – a coming.' 'Well then,' says Harry, '*coffin hand-bill* him.' 'I have,' says Binns, 'but he wont *stay coffin hand-billed*.' 'Mr. Adams, Mr. Adams,' says John H. Pleasants, 'the Hero's a coming – actually coming.' 'Well then,' says Mr. Adams, '*Burr* him and *traitor* him.' 'I have; but he wont *stay* Burred nor traitored.' Mr. Clay, Mr. Clay,' says Charles Hammond, 'Jackson is coming.' 'Well,' says Clay, 'prove him an adulterer and negro trader.' 'I have,' says Charles, 'but he wont *stay* an adulterer, nor a negro trader.' 'Mr. Clay,' bawls out the full Adams slandering chorus, 'we have called Jackson a tyrant, a murderer, an adulterer, a traitor, an ignoramus, a fool, a crook back, a retense, &c. &c. &c. but he wont *stay* any of those names.' 'He wont!' says Clay, 'why then I shan't *stay* at Washington – that's all. Uncle Toby, pack up my cards and pistols and let us be off. We have been long enough here.'" Emphasis in original.

religious, moral & respectable & intelligent people of the northern states.”<sup>108</sup> He might have added that the people of the northern states were not able to understand the fine distinctions between a private citizen selling a slave and a speculator who made his living from such transactions. They assumed that all traders lived up to their reputations and only a reprobate would sell slaves for gain.

Jackson’s connection to the slave trade lingered in the North well after his death and the question of whether he could be considered a speculator affords an opportunity to give depth to an analysis of the slave trader’s place in southern society. Theodore Parker, in reading two antislavery publications, noticed the allegations against Jackson. One boldly proclaimed that it was “well known” that Jackson was a “soul driver” and that he escorted a coffle of slaves to Louisiana for sale.<sup>109</sup> Parker accepted the accusations at face value and wrote a letter accusing Jackson of being a slave trader. The issue quickly became the topic of a public dispute.<sup>110</sup> Parker, realizing that his reputation was at stake, fired off a letter to James Birney, a former slaveholder who moved North and became a dedicated abolitionist. He wanted to know specifically if Jackson ever sold a slave, if he had engaged in the slave trade, and if he brought a coffle of slaves to Louisiana.<sup>111</sup> Birney, choosing his words carefully, did not defend

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<sup>108</sup> A. W. Putnam to Peter Force, 14 Sept. 1828, in Emil Edward Hurja Collection, Peter Force Materials, Box 28, Folder 25. Emphasis in original.

<sup>109</sup> Weld, *American Slavery as It Is*, p. 174 (quotation); Weld and Thome, *Slavery and the Internal Slave Trade*, p. 68.

<sup>110</sup> *Boston Post*, 14 June 1848.

<sup>111</sup> Theodore Parker to James Birney, 17 June 1848, Theodore Parker Papers.

Jackson's actions but could not describe Old Hickory as a slave trader. All people of influence in the South were slaveholders or came from slaveholding families and, as a consequence, all have sold, exchanged, or bought slaves, Birney explained. Jackson was no exception, and the fact that he had less slaves at his death than might be expected, demonstrates that he sold some of them. Even though Jackson sold slaves, Birney felt that calling him a slave trader "according to slave-holding idiom" would be using the term "improperly." However, "were I to say of him, that he dealt in slaves, without any conscientious restraint, *whenever he chose* – or that he was an *occasional* slave dealer, I should not regard myself as departing more from the truth."<sup>112</sup>

Birney used his musings about Jackson to instruct Parker on the place of the slave trade in southern society. In reflecting on his life there twenty years earlier, Birney admitted that it was "a difficult matter" for someone who had not lived in the South to "come precisely at what is meant *there* by Slave-dealer or Slave-trader." There was a "discernible difference" between the two, with the latter being "more obnoxious." It was the slave trader who had "no other business by which he makes his living than buying up slaves to sell again." He should not be confused with a "reputable" southerner who "occasionally" sold a slave for the highest price. Such a person had "another occupation by which he may be described – an occupation that is really primary, or which is so managed that it should seem so – his slave dealing being but subordinate or secondary." He would not be confused with a slave trader, "a word

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<sup>112</sup> James Birney to Theodore Parker, 5 July 1848, Ibid. Emphasis in original. The quotations from Birney in the following paragraphs are from this letter and all emphases are in the original.

of no small reproach at the South.” To make his point as clearly as possible, Birney borrowed the example of gambling. A man with a reputable calling may gamble and not be called a gambler, unlike the man who made gambling the basis of his livelihood. Just like the distinction between a slave dealer and a slave trader, the line was often indistinct. The point, however, was that an arbitrary distinction between different types of speculators emerged simultaneously with the growth of the interstate slave trade. Even while their actions may not have been appreciably different, the perceptions of them became separate. Southerners wanted to believe that there was a small group of itinerant traders who created most of the difficulties. It was this type of speculator, most thought, who destroyed slave families, escorted coffles, sold diseased slaves, and concealed the flaws of bondservants. They were the “slave-dealers.” All others who bought or sold slaves, even if they did so on a full-time basis, were innocent. That is how someone like Isaac Franklin avoided being classed as a slave trader. Speculators successfully separated the negative perceptions of slave trading from their business.

Bacon Tait, who operated a slave jail in Richmond, understood the fine distinctions Birney tried to explain to Parker. Tait wanted to quit the “negroe trade” and start a “negro auction & commission business.” Buying and selling slaves on commission appealed to him because it could be conducted “with perfect fairness.” Once his slave auction was well established, he could phase it out and sell other goods.<sup>113</sup> In this way, Tait could slowly disconnect himself from the speculative aspects of the slave trade. The prejudice Tait strove to avoid was long-lasting.

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<sup>113</sup> Bacon Tait to Rice C. Ballard, 14 Jan. (quotations), 31 Jan. 1838, Ballard Papers. Nothing ever came of Tait’s plans.



Speculators' desire to distance themselves from speculation was reflected by the letterhead of Pulliam and Company, well-known Richmond slave traders. On a letter describing the Richmond slave market, was the heading "Auctioneers for the Sale of Negroes, *Have no connection with the Negro Trade* THEY SELL ONLY ON COMMISSION."<sup>114</sup> In disassociating themselves from speculation, traders hoped to prove their good intentions. They did not want to be known as men who profited from the pain of slaves nor did they want the reputation of profit-takers. Slave traders refused to admit that their profession was based on misery and money.

Being called a slave trader was something most southern citizens wished to avoid. David Settle Reid became the target of a political attack while serving as United States Congressman. Reid, who had served earlier as a state representative, was running for governor of North Carolina. The local paper in Craven County, the *Newbernian*, castigated Reid for voting for the Wilmot Proviso, opposing internal improvements, and being a slave trader. It wondered whether Democrats in the area were "snowed under" by "their Wilmot Proviso, anti-Newbern Railroad, negro-trading candidate."<sup>115</sup> Reid's brother-in-law, Samuel F. Adams, moved quickly to minimize the damage. He confronted the newspaper's editor and "asked what Col Reid's friends were to understand he meant by negro-trading candidate." The editor "seemed much excited and greatly agitated." He apologized profusely and explained that some of his

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<sup>114</sup> Pulliam and Company letter, 15 Nov. 1860, Negro Collection, Duke. Emphasis in original. For more on Pulliam's operations, see Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South*, p. 52

<sup>115</sup> New Bern (North Carolina) *Newbernian*, 9 July 1850.

political friends supplied the erroneous information. The editor said it was “known to everyone” that Reid had a brother in eastern North Carolina who bought slaves “on speculation.” He just assumed Reid was part of the business and promised to print a retraction in the paper’s next issue. “So much for that thrashing machine,” Adams told Reid proudly.<sup>116</sup> The *Newbernian*’s editor printed an apology the next week. He explained it was a “common rumor” that Reid “had been, and was at the time, concerned in buying and selling negroes for profit. We meant by negro-trading—negro speculation of course.” Again, the paper carefully distinguished between different types of slave sales and implied that “negro speculation” was a worse type than the mere selling of slaves. The editor retracted the charge and any implications it might carry.<sup>117</sup>

There were other indications that southerners consciously or unconsciously distinguished between different types of slave traders. The writer who described “genuine negro speculators” as “depraved” made the subtle distinction that there were those who might sell slaves but were not actually speculators. These latter traders were not depraved because profits did not motivate them. A visitor to the South learned that “negro trader[s]” of the “better sort” did not accompany coffles but sent their agents or factors instead. Slaves must be sold, and it was better to deal with these men who were

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<sup>116</sup> Samuel F. Adams to David Settle Reid, 11 July 1850, David Settle Reid Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History. Tadman asserts that Reid was involved with Adams in a slave trading partnership, describing Adams as Reid’s nephew (Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, pp. 199-200).

<sup>117</sup> New Bern (North Carolina) *Newbernian*, 16 July 1850. The editor could not help but slip in another jab during the apology. He quickly added that “there is not the *least necessity* for making any charge, that is not strictly true, as Mr. Reid has *political* sins enough to answer for before the people, without his being burdened with charges that are not sustained by facts.” Emphasis in original.

“not all of the vilest sort.”<sup>118</sup> Even religious publications sanctioned the division of traders into different classes. The *Baptist Herald*, in dodging the question of whether slave trading was scriptural, thought that many Baptists acted as general auctioneers and agents, in which capacity they had to “dispose” of slaves. Even if they derived a profit from such sales, “they cannot be classed with professed negro-traders, who buy with a view to carry off those they purchase to the best market, though families may thereby be separated, and the slaves be transferred to brutal masters and to deadly climates.”<sup>119</sup>

As the *Herald*'s words suggest, perceptions of the interstate slave trade changed during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Speculators effectively countered bondservants' efforts to test the limits of slavery and undermine white authority. In the same way they asserted control over slave coffles, traders successfully uncoupled their activities from the more objectionable features of their business. They made their activities more palatable by concealing the offensive portions of the trade—coffles, kidnapping, and the separation of slave families. Traders also persistently lobbied to convince southern citizens that they merely facilitated slave sales rather than profited from them. As a result, the outrage over speculative activities declined since the trade came to be seen as less about profit at slaves' expense and more about providing a service to slaveholders. Speculators reinforced this idea by cultivating the notion that there were different types of slave traders and that established speculators could be trusted while itinerant traders could not. In short, speculators succeeded in

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<sup>118</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 13 Oct. 1818 (first and second quotations); Adams, *South-side View of Slavery*, p. 79 (remaining quotations).

<sup>119</sup> *Religious Herald*, 27 Mar. 1848.

shaping southern attitudes toward their profession. They did so during a rapid expansion of the interstate slave trade. Slave sales were more common and more frequent exposure to slave auctions and coffles inured southerners to the suffering of bondservants. A mounting external threat, moreover, solidified this new attitude and gave rise to the ultimate justification for speculators' existence.

## Chapter Seven

On January 6, 1829, Charles Miner took the floor of the House of Representatives and unleashed a withering attack that laid out the case for federal regulation of the District of Columbia's slave trade. In asking for a congressional investigation of the business, Miner made several damaging charges. He alleged that speculators had made the district "their head-quarters," public prisons had become part of the trade, some federal employees had derived benefits from speculation, "private and secret prisons" existed in the District, kidnapping was rampant, and "anguish and despair" were the hallmarks of the cruel traffic. He thought that the District had legislation less favorable to slaves than could be found in Maryland and Virginia even though the federal government could intervene and abolish the traffic. Even worse, Miner complained, was that the federal government served as an accomplice to "injustices and cruelty, scarcely exceeded on the coast of Africa."<sup>1</sup> Miner bolstered his argument by using several dramatic illustration that presented slaves as persons and insinuated that southerners treated bondservants as articles of commerce. He described how he witnessed a woman, "more heart-broken than any creature I had ever seen," sold from her family because she was "no longer profitable as a breeder." He also went into

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<sup>1</sup> *Register of Debates*, Twentieth Congress, Second Session, pp. 167, 175-80. The debate, and the fight over Miner's preamble, can be followed in *Niles' Weekly Register*, 10 Jan., pp. 327-28, 17 Jan., pp. 340-41, 7 Feb. 1829, p. 396; and *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 7 Feb. 1829. Miner alleged that 452 slaves were held in the local jail from 1824 to 1828 (1824: 81; 1825: 124; 1826-27: 156; 1828: 91). It is impossible to check the figures for accuracy, but they do reflect the slave trade's growth in the 1820s. Miner also alleged the following numbers of runaway slaves were held in the jail: 1824: 52; 1825: 58; 1826-27: 101; 1828: 79.

great detail how a black man was imprisoned for four hundred and five days, only being released when “vermin, disease, and misery” rendered him unfit for sale. Miner read a castigation of the trade from an 1802 Alexandria grand jury, recapped John Randolph’s speech of thirteen years earlier, quoted excerpts from the *Alexandria Phenix Gazette*, cited advertisements for the slave trade, and described the interior of an Alexandria slave pen. In accusing his colleagues of sanctioning the evil with their inaction, he wondered, “If you take no steps to correct it, does not your silence imply acquiescence, if not approbation?” Miner then laid bare the real reason for his resolution. “Sooner or later,” he predicted, slavery “must become the subject of our legislation.” Miner deliberately used the interstate slave trade to demonstrate slavery’s evils, shame southern slave owners, and prod his fellow congressmen into passing legislation that would restrict slavery’s growth.<sup>2</sup>

Southerners must have found it hard to sit through Miner’s brutal attack, and the effect of his speech was electrifying. One newspaper judged that “Mr. Miner has produced the greatest excitement with which we have been visited this session...There are spirits in this house which catch and explode whenever that subject [i.e., slavery] is touched.”<sup>3</sup> Miner’s speech was particularly odious because he lectured his southern colleagues that he had visited “*your* prisons and other scenes of wretchedness.” In making this pointed reference, Miner attacked slaveholders in particular and all

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<sup>2</sup> The grand jury statement is discussed in pp. 110-11 of this study, while Randolph’s speech is found in pp. 133-38. Miner read from the 22 June 1827 issue of the *Alexandria Phenix Gazette*.

<sup>3</sup> Clipping of Washington *United States Gazette*, 8 Jan. 1829, John Agg Papers, Duke.

southerners in general.<sup>4</sup> This tactic of specifically indicting southerners was certain to provoke a response. The interstate slave trade was merely, for Miner, an effective way to dramatize the general evil that slavery produced. He called for a reform not only of the interstate trade, but of southern society through the abolition of slavery.<sup>5</sup>

The southern response to Miner's speech was quite different from earlier Congressional discussions of the interstate slave trade, where southerners either ignored similar charges or asserted the rights of migrants to bring slaves across state boundaries. John C. Weems of Maryland took responsibility for correcting Miner's "mistaken zeal" that had suppressed his "usual good judgment." Weems's rebuttal was a turning point because he responded with the first known public defense of the interstate slave trade by a citizen of the Upper South. His answer to Miner was a precursor of the arguments southerners would use throughout the 1830s and beyond in their defense of the interstate slave trade and of slavery. Weems carefully explained that slavery was a benign institution where masters rarely sold their slaves. On such occasions, slaveholders were not to blame. Weems used the circumstances surrounding the recent sale of a woman and her children to demonstrate his point. A free black man bought his family on credit but could not pay off the loan. The creditor did all he could, but had to sell the family to satisfy the obligation. Weems insinuated that market forces were to

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<sup>4</sup> *Register of Debates*, p. 176. Emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup> The persistent use of the interstate slave trade as a means to attack slavery is demonstrated in Lightner, "Door to the Slave Bastille," pp. 235-52; Lightner, "Interstate Slave Trade in Antislavery Politics," pp. 119-36; and Deyle, "Domestic Slave Trade," pp. 144-210. Neither Lightner nor Deyle discuss Miner's speech or the subsequent debate.

blame in such cases, especially since he personally intervened to prevent the sale.

Nothing could be done, so the woman and children were sold to Georgia. This story had a happy ending, according to Weems. The woman wrote her spouse that she belonged to a “good and humane” master and was “as happily situated as she had ever been, save the separation from her husband.” Even when slaves happened to be sold south, their condition was improved. The gist of Weems’s speech was that separation of families was unusual and that in the rare cases where it happened, the slaves were usually better off. He was politely telling outsiders that they should not try to fix something that was not broken.<sup>6</sup>

Weems went further, however. He related the story of a colleague in Congress who wanted to buy several families of slaves for his sugar plantation, provided, of course, they were willing to move. Weems approached his brother, whose “kind treatment” of his slaves and low prices for crops had brought him to the point of selling his land because he “could not bear the idea of selling his slaves.” Weems persuaded his brother to sell twenty slaves in families. When he asked the bondservants for their permission, they “put up their thanks to God” even though they hated to leave their master. On the sale day, the slaves left “most cheerfully and happily.” Weems’s brother felt the opposite emotions. “He never recovered his feelings” and died a short time later, presumably of a broken heart. Weems explained that he took so much time clarifying this situation because he resented Miner’s personal attacks. Slavery, if fully examined, was not objectionable. Moreover, Weems continued, the Bible supported

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<sup>6</sup> *Register of Debates*, pp. 182-83 (quotations); *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 23 Apr. 1829.



slavery. He cited the curse of Ham, the fact that Old Testament patriarchs owned slaves, and Paul's admonition to Philemon to have mercy on a bondservant. Since slavery was part of the social fabric in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, Weems could not understand why his colleagues questioned it.<sup>7</sup>

Weems finished his rebuttal by defending slave traders. There might be "some truth" to Miner's description of the "dealers in human flesh," but not much. Speculators were "very useful citizens" because they purchased convict slaves and felonious free men and housed them in jail before starting south. Weems would rather see slaves in local jails than to have "worse than wild beasts of the forest, let loose amongst us." Lest representatives from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama become alarmed, Weems was certain that the slave trade rehabilitated its participants. When they "see before them no possible chance of escape, they become more than usually valuable" and turn into "the most sprightly fellows." Weems drew upon the stereotype of slave traders in his lengthy response. He discounted any widespread denunciation of slave families and denied that money motivated speculators. Instead of being detrimental to the South as Miner alleged, the slave trade was beneficial.<sup>8</sup>

When Weems finished, Richard H. Wilde tried to end the discussion by moving the previous question. Moderate Ichabod Bartlett wanted to soothe matters and suggested Miner withdraw his preamble, which was the chief cause of trouble. When Miner declined, Mark Alexander moved to table the resolutions. His motion failed one

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. pp. 183-85.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 186.

hundred seven to sixty-six. Even though the House agreed to move ahead, it did so cautiously. A subsequent vote to adopt the preamble lost by an even more lopsided margin.<sup>9</sup> The House postponed any action on the matter by creating a committee to “inquire into the slave trade as it exists in, and is carried through, the District.” This resolution carried on the strength of northern representatives, although eighteen southerners voted for it. All of these men, however, came from the slave exporting states of Maryland (5), Delaware (1), Virginia (4), North Carolina (3), Tennessee (1), and Kentucky (4).<sup>10</sup> A third resolution, to inquire into gradual abolition in the District of Columbia, failed one hundred fourteen to sixty-six. Only eleven representatives of slaveholding states, all of them slave exporting states, sided with northern representatives in this vote. The willingness of Upper South Congressmen to question the interstate slave trade or slavery was fading.<sup>11</sup>

The Committee on the District of Columbia reported its findings on the slave trade about a month later. Southerners controlled the committee and shaped the report to their liking. In a masterful stroke of disingenuous language, the committee felt that

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 191-92. The vote was 141-36. This and the subsequent votes’ registers are found in *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 10 Jan. 1829. Representatives from Connecticut (3), Indiana (1), Massachusetts (2), New Hampshire (1), New Jersey (3), New York (5), Ohio (11), Pennsylvania (8), Rhode Island (1), and Vermont (1) voted for the bill. The paper, in its story said thirty-seven members voted for the preamble, but listed only thirty-six names in the voting summary.

<sup>10</sup> The representatives were Armstrong, Barney, Blair, Buckner, Chambers, Culpeper, Daniel, Johns, Leffler, Letcher, Little, Maxwell, Mercer, Sheppard, Washington, Weems, Williams, and Wilson. The total was 120-59.

<sup>11</sup> The vote by state was Maryland (2), Delaware (1), Virginia (2), North Carolina (2), Kentucky (3), and Tennessee (1).

the “situation” of slaves who were sold from Washington was “considerably mitigated by being transported to a more genial and bountiful clime.” Even though “violence may sometimes be done to their feelings,” the laws of society could not be avoided. It should be of some consolation “to those who are interested in their [slaves’] behalf to know that their condition is more frequently bettered and their minds happier by the change.”<sup>12</sup>

The debates surrounding Miner’s proposal show that residents of the Upper South had changed their attitude about the interstate slave trade. Where they once ignored or questioned its harmful effects, they now explained and justified the trade’s presence. Virginia decisively rejected a proposal to emancipate and deport its slaves, while colonization itself became a dead issue in the rest of the South. With no foreseeable solution to the problem of “excess” bondservants, the interstate slave trade became a more attractive option. Northerners, furthermore, began calling on the South to abolish slavery. They used the interstate slave trade as a powerful illustration of the institution’s evil effects. With slavery penned in and under attack, southerners chose to defend it without reservation. Thus, they had to find somehow to justify or explain away the interstate slave trade. They employed various methods, but the eventual result was a stereotype of itinerant slave traders, slaves, owners, and abolitionists. Speculators became scapegoats and were an effective way to protect slavery. Southerners, in effect,

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<sup>12</sup> Washington *National Intelligencer*, 7 Feb. 1829 (quotations); Jay, *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 54; Weld and Thome, *Slavery and the Internal Slave Trade*, p. 211. There were two representatives from Virginia (Alexander, Allen), and Maryland (Washington, Weems), and one each from Pennsylvania (Kremer), Massachusetts (Varnum), and Connecticut (Ingersoll).

had to deny the reality of the interstate slave trade before they could fully accept slavery.

Amid this climate of shifting beliefs, and in the wake of the Nat Turner rebellion, Virginia embarked on a public debate over the future of slavery in that state. Since the Old Dominion easily had the most slaves amongst the states that were net exporters of bondservants, the debates had enormous significance for the future of the interstate slave trade. Should the legislature decide to end slavery in Virginia, the number of slaves available for sale would plummet. The majority of bondservants in the slave markets of the Lower South came from Virginia, and their absence would have drastically driven up prices. These facts were not lost on the debate's participants, and the interstate slave trade was an important part of the discussion. Delegates who favored some type of gradual emancipation usually linked their schemes to a plan of colonization. They realized that colonization and the interstate slave trade worked at cross purposes, so the debates inextricably linked the two. Supporters of colonization joined with opponents of slavery to show why the peculiar institution itself needed to be slowly snuffed out. Their efforts came to naught, and what the discussion convincingly demonstrated was slavery's entrenched position and how ineffectual were those who desired to rid the state of the peculiar institution. Moreover, it underscored the need to do something with Virginia's slaves and with the lack of change came a renewed support of the interstate slave trade.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution*; Joseph C. Robert, *The Road from Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832* (Durham, N. C., 1941). The interstate slave trade, it can be argued, made it possible to discuss publicly various plans for gradual abolition since it denuded the state of slaves. It was only because the

Thomas Jefferson Randolph proposed that all slaves born on or after July 4, 1840 become state property, males at age twenty-one, and females at age eighteen. He called for a statewide referendum on the matter and his plan became the fulcrum of the debate. Until they reached maturity, the bondservants would work for pay in order to defray the cost of shipping them to Africa. Like most of the proponents of emancipation, Randolph realized speculation's significance for Virginia. He knew that a robust slave market increased prices and decreased the opportunity for colonization. As a consequence, he attacked the slave trade in the hopes of shaming his colleagues into listening to his proposals. Randolph accused Virginia slaveholders of converting the state into a "grand menagerie" where slaves were "reared for the market, like oxen, for the shambles." He hated how the "ties of father, mother, husband, and child" were broken when masters sold their slaves to "cruel taskmasters."<sup>14</sup> Randolph drew upon personal experience in preparing his remarks. He assumed the debts of his grandfather, Thomas Jefferson, and promised to pay off all creditors. Part of that process involved selling slaves, which he described as a "sad scene." Although he tried his best to keep families together, the episode confirmed Randolph's disgust with the bitter fruit of slavery.<sup>15</sup>

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percentage of bondservants was decreasing that Virginia could consider abolishing slavery altogether.

<sup>14</sup> Randolph, as quoted in Robert, *Road from Monticello*, p. 97. Slavery's opponents made frequent use of his remarks (Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1854; reprint, Salem, N. H., 1987), p. 291; Weld and Thome, *Slavery and the Internal Slave Trade*, p. 66; Jay, *Miscellaneous Writings*, pp. 264-65).

<sup>15</sup> Randolph, as quoted in Freehling, *Drift toward Dissolution*, p. 132.

Most who sided with Randolph made special note of how slave trading corrupted Virginians. Their primary line of reasoning was that speculation degraded all who were involved in the transaction. While the slave obviously felt the sting of the trade most keenly, the master who willingly sold his bondservants neglected his obligation to protect his slaves as he stooped to petty motives of financial gain. Friends and foes of emancipation recognized that one function of the trade was to inflate the price of slaves and prop up the domestic institution in the state. Thomas Marshall, who favored gradual abolition, made this connection during a speech in which he advocated the sale of the state's public land to raise money for colonization. His scheme would never work, he admitted, if masters continued to sell slaves for gain. While humanity might prevent some masters from "selling to the traders who purchase for the southern markets," enough other slaveholders did not restrain themselves and, as a result, drove up the prices of slaves. The greed of these masters was sufficient to make colonization too expensive and unworkable. Many owners would not give away their slaves or sell them to a neighbor at a reduced price, Marshall said, for fear that they would end up being sold to the Deep South. Even if a slaveholder acted from pure motives, his good deeds might be negated by his neighbor. This tension between humanity and commerce wrecked the chances of colonization.<sup>16</sup>

Slavery's defenders also recognized the interstate slave trade's importance. William O. Goode fought against any attempt to speed Virginia towards free soil, but

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Marshall, *The Speech of Thomas Marshall in the House of Delegates of Virginia, on the Abolition of Slavery* (Richmond, 1832), p. 10. Others who spoke against the trade were Philip A. Boling and William H. Brodnax (Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution*, pp. 140-43, 185).

recognized that slavery naturally flowed to where it was most useful. In this fashion, the northern states had already rid themselves of the peculiar institution and Virginia would probably follow their course. "Natural causes," he explained, would accomplish a peaceful "removal of slavery from Virginia." He concluded there was no reason to entertain such foolish notions as gradual emancipation or colonization. In other words, Goode counted on the domestic slave trade to rid Virginia of slaves.<sup>17</sup> James H.

Gholson had a similar opinion. He reasoned that Virginia's slaves constituted the "largest portion of our wealth" and that their value "was regulated by the demand for it [i.e. slave labor] in the western markets." Gholson reminded his listeners that "any measures which should close the markets against us, would essentially impair our wealth and prosperity." The slave trade, in other words, was a vital part of Virginia's economy.<sup>18</sup>

The proponents and opponents of colonization had similar assumptions.<sup>19</sup> Most delegates realized that the operation of the interstate slave trade was in direct contravention to any plan of gradual emancipation or colonization. The high price of slaves deterred owners from freeing their bondservants; it was difficult to pass up the financial windfall that could be found in the sale of a slave's body. In a similar fashion, the state government could hardly expect to raise enough money to pay prices that were artificially raised by the slave market. The state, in theory, had the option of legally

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<sup>17</sup> Richmond *Constitutional Whig*, 28 Mar. 1832, as quoted in Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution*, p. 155.

<sup>18</sup> Gholson, as quoted in Robert, *Road from Monticello*, p. 68.

prohibiting the sale of slaves to southern states, but such an idea was unthinkable. That course of action would have given too much power to the government and eroded the rights of the slaveholder. A thriving slave market ruined colonization's chances to succeed.

Thomas R. Dew reiterated these ideas in his commentary on the Virginia Debates. Dew's writing was emblematic of the shift to a more aggressive defense of slavery throughout the South. His arguments have become quite familiar, but in his defense of slavery he also analyzed the slave trade. He mocked the idea of colonization by pointing out the folly of the state government trying to "overbid the Southern seeker." Dew thought Virginia would, given enough time, become a free state. Slaves would go further south with white laborers naturally filling the void. He went further, though, and turned colonization on its head. Instead of ridding Virginia of slaves, colonization would augment their numbers by cutting off the flow to southern markets. Dew did not have to add that an excess of slaves invited a race war. Although his reasoning in this regard was faulty, since slaves would have continued to go south rather than become a burden to their owners, Dew's implicit threat of a rebellion was calculated to undercut any vestige of support for colonization. He even reiterated the Biblical justification for the slave trade. Though he condemned the sale of Joseph into slavery, "the practice of buying and selling slaves seems to be justified" in the rest of scripture. Dew carefully examined his Bible and learned that Jews bought foreigners and fathers sold their daughters into slavery. Other cultures, including the Irish,

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<sup>19</sup> The same could be said for most of the delegates (Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution*, pp. 166-69, 202-8).



Africans, and Indians sold their kin into slavery, so the institution was common to man and was therefore normal. The reasons more people did not sell themselves into slavery, according to Dew, were that the law forbade it or they could locate no purchasers. He concluded that bargain and sale were legitimate parts of slavery and natural consequences of the master-slave relationship. Thus, according to Dew, the slave trade was not only beneficial for Virginia, it was pleasant for the slave.<sup>20</sup>

Hoping to repair the damage caused by Dew's argument, the American Colonization Society selected Jesse B. Harrison to draft a rebuttal. His response showed the futility of colonization and emancipation in the face of a surging slave market. Like Dew, Harrison thought Virginia would eventually become a free state. He believed, however, that the process should be accelerated before slavery inflicted any more damage. Harrison was quick to correct what he saw as Dew's misguided view of the slave trade. He drew a direct parallel between the African trade and the internal trade and wisely pointed out that if Virginians needed to sell their slaves to stave off economic need, then the state was in dire straits. A reliance on the "contaminated" internal trade illustrated the "degradation to which slavery may reduce its supporters!" Harrison invoked the names of Washington and Jefferson in order to shame any who bought or sold slaves for profit, noting that speculation in slaves was a source of "impure wealth" which must be resisted.<sup>21</sup> His argumentation illustrated the weakness of those who disliked the internal trade: they could do little to change the

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<sup>20</sup> Dew, "Review of the Debate," pp. 317 (first quotation), 318-22, 359 (second quotation); Faust, ed., *Ideology of Slavery*, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> [Harrison], *Review of the Slave Question*, pp. 17, 32-33.

Moral suasion was one method of trying to counter the growth of the trade, but there was no effective organization to channel the energies of those who wanted to end speculation. The best they could do was to illustrate the essential humanity of the slaves in order to convince others not to treat them as beasts. Moralizing proved ineffective in blunting the force of economic considerations.

The discussion about gradually ending slavery in Virginia went nowhere. It was simply too difficult to find a satisfying political solution to remove something that was an integral part of the society. Talk of colonization continued, but the idea had no chance of succeeding once the legislature refused to formally endorse or fund a program. "ASHMUN," writing in the *Petersburg Times*, conceded that public opinion about colonization was fluctuating in the wake of the Nat Turner revolt. While moderately in favor of the state buying slaves and shipping them to Africa, Ashmun pointed out that the interstate trade, "Painful as it is," accomplished the same purpose at no price to the state. Echoing the ideas of Harrison and Dew, he realized that the state could not compete with the slave trade and bluntly concluded, "Virginia cannot stop it."<sup>22</sup> Others even taunted the colonization movement by accusing it of raising the price of slaves. One writer, calling himself "ANTI-ABOLITIONIST," argued that slave prices increased rapidly despite the "ravages" of cholera. High prices would not encourage emancipation or colonization, and the only way to rid the state of slavery was to make slave labor less valuable, which would invite slaveholders to give up a useless

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<sup>22</sup> Undated *Petersburg Times*, as quoted in *Western Luminary*, 11 Jan. 1832. Jehudi Ashmun was a fund-raiser and spokesman for the American Colonization Society who also served in Liberia as a colonial agent and died there in 1828 (Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, pp. 73-74, 88-91, 150-62).

investment. He did not see such a scenario happening any time soon.<sup>23</sup> It was painfully clear to colonization's supporters that the operation of the interstate slave trade inflated prices at a time when a drop in the cost of slaves was necessary for any colonization scheme to work. With slave prices rising in the late 1820s and beyond, the cost of purchasing and deporting slaves became prohibitive.<sup>24</sup>

Once Virginia squelched the program of state-sponsored colonization, it became apparent that the states would not be willing or able to coordinate and fund any colonization efforts. The A.C.S. looked to the federal government as the only viable alternative and stepped up its campaign to secure federal funds. Colonization adherents wanted to use the proceeds from the sale of public land to pay for buying and shipping slaves, but they only steered the organization in an anti-slavery direction. Democrats and Southerners were loathe to do anything that gave Washington any more power than it needed, especially when it came to the sensitive issue of slavery. Andrew Jackson's veto of the Distribution Bill in 1833, a measure that would have funded colonization with money from public land sales, effectively neutered the organization.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, 17 Sept. 1833.

<sup>24</sup> After bottoming out in 1818, slave prices rose during the next nineteen years until their collapse in the panic of 1837. There does not appear to be a direct connection between the price of slaves and the number of slaves colonized. Freudenberger and Pritchett, "The Domestic United States Slave Trade," p. 457, have slave prices while Staudenraus, *American Colonization Movement*, p. 251, has the number of slaves sent to Africa by the A.C.S.

<sup>25</sup> Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, pp. 184-87. As colonization became linked to the removal of slaves with federal funds, critics in the Lower South castigated the A.C.S. as a tool of abolitionists. They were concerned that removal of all the slaves would cause the southern economy to collapse. An unstated concern was that the A.C.S. would serve as a competitor to the supply of slaves and raise prices.

Colonization, more of a sentiment than a solution, faltered in the face of reality. It offered comfort that somehow slavery could be removed without disturbing society or making sacrifices. Those who adhered to its precepts underestimated how deeply slavery had become enmeshed in the culture; they offered a simple solution to a complex problem. Colonization, moreover, could not compete with the slave markets of the Lower South. In the twenty-five years after its formation in 1816, the A.C.S. sent just over 3,800 slaves to Africa, or about one hundred and fifty per year. State organizations probably doubled this total, but their combined efforts did not make a dent in the slave population. The interstate trade far outstripped these numbers. The largest drawback of the trade was its methods, because most southerners envisioned a milder way to remove slaves. As speculation became more accepted, Upper South residents could abandon their commitment to colonization and rest easy that the trade reduced the slave population.<sup>26</sup>

Besides the competition with the slave market, colonization was becoming an anachronism. It was a moderate solution at a time when moderation was evaporating. The A.C.S. tried to find a middle way between the extremes of unimpeded slavery and abolition, but could not. Southerners were less likely to be introspective as they faced

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Furthermore, as slaves left the country, those who remained would become strident about asserting claims to freedom. Most citizens of the Deep South refused to have any contact with an organization they saw as a threat to slavery (Fredrickson, *Black Image in the White Mind*, pp. 25-26).

<sup>26</sup> The national total is calculated from Staudenraus, *American Colonization Movement*, p. 251. For the totals of the state organizations from 1820 to 1856, see T. Michael Miller, "'Out of Bondage:' A History of the Alexandria Colonization Society," *Alexandria History*, 7 (1987): 27. The national organization colonized few slaves in the 1840s, but the next decade saw more activity. It was active as late as 1899.

the harsh glare of abolitionist assaults in the 1830s and beyond. The Upper South, a bastion of support for colonization, was less inclined to consider the idea when speculation siphoned off many of its slaves. In this sense, the interstate slave trade fulfilled one of the major functions of the American Colonization Society—removing slaves. It had the added bonus of being more remunerative to masters than colonization.

If citizens of the Upper South were still divided over the efficacy of speculation when support for colonization evaporated, an outside threat dispelled most of their doubts. The interstate slave trade, in fact, was one of the easiest points of attack for slavery's opponents but those assaults prompted doubters to rally to the trade's defense. Abolitionists portrayed slavery in the worst possible light, and a natural way to do that was to provide information about the slave trade. Lurid stories detailing the trade's abuses became a focal point of the radical abolitionist campaign to annihilate slavery. Speculation was a convenient target because it destroyed slave families and implied that masters let personal profit triumph over concern for slaves. Publications such as the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, *Freedom's Journal*, and the *Liberator* regularly contained stories on the trade, reprinted advertisements of slave sales, and included harsh editorials about the buying and selling of human beings. The *Liberator*, for instance, printed the woodcut of a slave sale on its masthead and had a regular feature entitled the "Black List" that featured the slave trade's abuses. From its inception, the American Anti-Slavery Society called for Congressional action to end to the trade. Prominent abolitionists like William Jay, Henry B. Stanton, Alvan Stewart, Benjamin Lundy, and William Lloyd Garrison all were vocal about the need to put a stop to the

trade.<sup>27</sup> The torrent of abuse directed towards commerce in slaves was so great that even a casual visitor to the United States noticed that “the slave-trade is now become more than formerly a subject of discussion.”<sup>28</sup>

One of the abolitionists’ first tactics was to flood Congress with petitions to terminate the interstate slave trade and abolish slavery. Although most of them focused on the District of Columbia, by 1837 the House of Representatives received petitions signed by 23,405 people that called for an end to the interstate trade.<sup>29</sup> Perceptive northerners realized that the slave trade was vital to slavery’s existence because it kept bondservants valuable in the Upper South and supplied the labor demand for the Lower South.<sup>30</sup> They attacked the slave trade as being brutal, transforming humans into property, operating contrary to God’s law, and fostering greed by encouraging slave holders to sell their slaves for high prices. In essence, they repeated all of the misgivings that Upper South residents had in the 1820s. The abolitionists’ tone, however, was different than that of Upper South residents. Opponents of slavery were

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<sup>27</sup> Mayer, *All on Fire*, p. 75; Lightner, “Door to the Slave Bastille,” pp. 235-52; Lightner, “Interstate Slave Trade in Antislavery Politics,” pp. 119-36; Deyle, “Domestic Slave Trade,” pp. 144-210.

<sup>28</sup> C. D. Arfwedson, *The United States and Canada, in 1832, 1833, and 1834*, 2 vol. (London, 1834), 1: 352. The abolitionists’ switch to immediatism and more provocative tactics may be seen in Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, pp. 162-200; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York, 1976), pp. 33-73; and Betram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland, 1969), pp. 98-125.

<sup>29</sup> *Liberator*, 23 June 1837, p. 102.

<sup>30</sup> Lightner, “Door to the Slave Bastille,” pp. 243-44; Deyle, “Domestic Slave Trade,” pp. 182-85.

more willing to attack slavery in specific detail rather than general terms. Instead of condemning slavery in the abstract, abolitionists seized upon vivid accounts of beatings, murders, mutilations, escapes, and auctions as the most effective way to illustrate the horrors of the peculiar institution. Their critique of slavery brought criticism of slave owners to a personal level. Masters were no longer the victims of an unfortunate labor system, but were active participants in an evil and exploitative regime. Those southerners who did nothing to eradicate slavery were equally culpable.

Southerners, however, did not allow the consistent and growing criticism of slavery pass without a response. The growth of an external threat to slavery that was vocal and personal triggered an aggressive defense of the peculiar institution. In public debates and official pronouncements slavery was less and less an evil, but was more and more a positive good. Instead of being a benighted institution that hindered southern development, it was superior to the North's grimy capitalism. Southern politicians outdid themselves to prove their loyalty to slavery.<sup>31</sup> Not only did southerners rally around slavery, but they also defended speculation in slaves. The Deep South had long been aware of its dependence on the interstate slave trade, but it took several years for the Upper South to swing around to a defense of the trade. A recognition of the trade's necessity helped bring uniformity to southern opinions about slavery.

The simplest way to defend the interstate slave trade was to minimize its importance. If southerners could make the argument that speculation was of little consequence for the South, then they would effectively counter claims that masters

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<sup>31</sup> This idea is most forcefully argued in William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge, 1978), especially pp. 58-69.

exploited their slaves. Thomas Cooper, for instance, framed his defense of slavery around six assertions about the peculiar institution. One of the charges described the trade as cruel, tyrannical, and unjust because it meted out punishment, separated husbands and wives, and prohibited education.<sup>32</sup> Cooper carefully rebutted each of the accusations. He suggested that separation of families occurred in every country and in every time, so the trade could not be singled out for causing wanton cruelty. In the South, he claimed, such a thing “may occur occasionally...but, for the most part, husbands and wives are not parted.” If, on the odd chance, slaves happened to be sold, “in nine cases out of ten” a neighbor purchased them. Separation occurred as often in whites as in blacks, so “the evil is so rare, that none such [regulation] has yet been made.” Even if slaves were separated from their families, “the very slight bonds of concubinage” meant that they were hardly bothered. Cooper was confident in the slaveholders’ ability to gradually “check the evils attendant on our system, and, for our own sakes, to ameliorate the condition of our slave.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, the slave trade was so rare that northerners need not waste their time trying to reform it. The *Charleston Patriot* echoed this idea. Any sound or fury about the trade signified nothing, since the debate about the interstate trade was based on “the false philanthropy or mawkish sensibility of the abolitionists” and not on a realistic appraisal of the

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<sup>32</sup> *Southern Literary Journal*, Nov. 1835, pp. 188-93. The other five charges were: slavery was inconsistent with the laws of God, it violated the rights of man, it contravened the Declaration of Independence, natural law did not allow slavery, and the North was flourishing more than the South. The index attributed the article to Cooper (p. iv).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190



words, were overwrought about something of minor importance and should drop the matter.<sup>34</sup>

The real danger of this outside interference, many southerners felt, was that it corrupted the relationship between master and slave. It was no small stretch for southerners to read abolitionist rhetoric about the necessity to end slavery and then assume that slaves imbibed such notions. How slaves could incorporate these ideas, since most could not read and did not have contact with northerners, usually went unexplained. After Nat Turner's rebellion, Governor A. B. Roman of Louisiana issued a call for legislation prohibiting interstate slave traders from bringing bondservants into the state. He warned the legislature that "[c]onspiracies of slaves, instigated, most probably, by imprudent propagandists and the false philanthropy of a certain class of persons styling themselves as the friends of the blacks, and who in reality are their greatest enemies, have been plotted in several states of the Union." In calling for an end to the interstate trade in his state, Roman blamed abolitionists for inciting Virginia slaves to revolt.<sup>35</sup> Cooper also blamed abolitionists for degrading the master-slave relationship because they "render it necessary to draw the cords of subjugation tighter instead of relaxing them."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Undated *Charleston Patriot*, as quoted in *Niles' Weekly Register*, 19 Sept. 1835.

<sup>35</sup> New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, 16 Nov. 1831 (quotation); *Louisiana Senate Journal*, Extra tenth session (New Orleans, 1832), p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Southern Literary Journal*, Nov. 1835, p. 190.

Not only were attacks on the interstate slave trade undermining the master-slave relationship, they were part of a broad conspiracy to destroy the South. Abolitionists were rash and dangerous, according to one southern newspaper. It protested that the South did not “create slavery” but inherited it from England. The “cupidity of the Slave dealers of the North, contributed to fasten it upon us.” Although the South may not like slavery, it was so “interwoven with our habits, that immediate abolition would tear up the foundation of society.”<sup>37</sup> Citizens of the northern and western states were trying “to produce a direct interference with the slave property of the southern and south western states.” Even though abolitionists sent “seditious and incendiary doctrines” through the mail, the “fanatics do not stop here.” They were trying to assert the right of the federal government to “interfere with our property.” This meddling took several forms, including emancipation in the District of Columbia or the territories, and inhibiting the “transportation of slaves, as such, from one state to another.”<sup>38</sup> Defense of the slave trade, then, was integral to an overall justification of slavery.

This aggressive position made itself felt in the halls of Congress. Northern congressmen became more assertive in their efforts to shame southerners into admitting the evil effects of the interstate trade. Southerners, in turn, were increasingly outspoken about resisting any and all attempts to use the trade as a way to attack slavery. Miner’s speech was an early salvo, but northern assaults became more frequent in the 1830s. The trade in the District of Columbia was a favorite target because it made for good

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<sup>37</sup> Huntsville *Southern Advocate*, 10 Sept. 1833.

<sup>38</sup> Woodville *Republican*, 9 Jan. 1836.

press back home and it could plausibly be argued that the federal government had the authority to intervene in Washington's affairs. In 1835, for instance, northern representatives from Maine, Massachusetts, and New York introduced petitions to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia.<sup>39</sup> One of their tactics was reading local slave traders' advertisements in the hopes of shaming southerners into admitting the wretchedness of slavery. The tactic failed. Henry Wise of Virginia responded in the hopes of quenching the "spirits of both extremes of fanaticism and of disorganization." He sarcastically said he was sorry that northerners were shocked when they saw advertisements, even though "their fathers did more than any other people of the colonies to establish slavery amongst us." The obnoxious advertisements could not be silenced since the buying and selling of slaves was too important to slavery. Wise pointed out that slavery was "interwoven with our very political existence." He could have added that the interstate slave trade was part of the fabric as well. Wise was effective in his rebuttal, as a vote of one hundred thirty-nine to sixty-three tabled the measure.<sup>40</sup> Southerners were growing strong in their belief that interference with slavery in the District of Columbia would lead to widespread regulation of the interstate

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<sup>39</sup> *Register of Debates in Congress*, Twenty-Third Congress, Second Session, Part Two, 16 Feb. 1835 (Washington, 1830), pp. 1392-93. This heated discussion came two weeks after John Dickson of New York introduced several petitions asking for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia. Southerners promptly tabled the measure (*Register of Debates*, Twenty-Third Congress, Second Session, Part One, 2 Feb. 1835, pp. 1131-33).

<sup>40</sup> *Register of Debates*, Twenty-Third Congress, Second Session, 16 Feb. 1835, pp. 1398 (first quotation), 1399 (second and third quotations); *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, 10 Feb. 1835. Vote on p. 1401.

slave trade. The South could not yield to either measure since the final result would be slavery's end.<sup>41</sup>

Two years later, in the Senate, Samuel L. Southard of New Jersey tried to find some of the shrinking middle ground during another debate on ending slavery in the District of Columbia. Northern petitions variously asked for the abolition of slavery in the Washington or the end of the slave trade there. Southard made a distinction between the two when he called for an end to the slave trade in the District but denied that he wanted to touch slavery itself. He explicitly disavowed the right of the federal government to interfere with slavery.<sup>42</sup> William C. Preston of South Carolina vigorously opposed Southard's proposal. Preston called the separation of the slave trade from slavery "a distinction without a difference" and objected to all interference in the matter. Southerners were "sore on the subject" and their "nerves were irritated" by the "violent and incessant attacks." Propositions to "meddle with the slave trade in the District were but an entering wedge" to destroying slavery, according to Preston. The South Carolinian was irritated that southerners were assumed to be transgressors of God's laws who lived in vice and wickedness.<sup>43</sup> When Preston finished his outburst, Southard continued and clarify his position. He was not an abolitionist and was not condemning the South or southerners. He merely joined "distinguished Southern

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<sup>41</sup> Undated *Richmond Enquirer*, as quoted in undated Columbia (South Carolina) *Times*, as quoted in *Liberator*, 21 Feb. 1835.

<sup>42</sup> *Register of Debates*, Twenty-Fourth Congress, Second Session, Part One, 6 Feb. 1837, p. 712

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 713. The quotations for the remainder of this paragraph are taken from this page.

gentlemen” in opposing the character of the trade in the District. All Southard asked was for a distinction to be made between the abolition of slavery in Washington and the “suppression of crimes and enormities in the traffic in slaves.” Preston could not keep quiet. He admitted that “Southern gentlemen, especially Mr. Randolph, had taken the ground adverted to,” but times had changed. “The country,” he explained, “had not then been filled with abolition principles.” What might have been done safely then was dangerous now, because to touch slavery in the District was to affect the entire South “immediately.” Petitions were exaggerated for effect, “with a view to rouse the feelings of the community, and inflame the fanaticism” of northerners. Preston had no doubt that if Randolph was present, “he would be the very last man to advocate a tampering with this subject.”

Alfred Cuthbert of Georgia continued to fend off the attacks. He felt that if “Congress could touch the smallest mite connected with the entire subject” of slavery the result would send “a thrill of dread and horror through all the South.” Even the smallest concession would be seized by the abolitionists as a triumph. William C. Rives said he witnessed the whole discussion with “pain and mortification.” There was no justification for the view that Congress could regulate the internal slave trade. The Virginian contended that “the gratuitous exhibitions of these horrid pictures of misery” had no basis in fact. He thought the petitioners, and those senators who listened to them, were just trying to stir up trouble.<sup>44</sup> John Calhoun then asserted that slavery was a “great good.” The Senate made no progress and voted to table the petition along a

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 715 (first quotation), 717 (subsequent quotations).

sectional vote.<sup>45</sup> One speculator knew that southerners would not allow anything to happen that would jeopardize his livelihood. "This abolitionist petitioning," he told a northerner, "is just an attempt to join church and state." He thought it would "blow over" soon. The man, who refused to describe himself as a slave trader, noted that "the slave-traders tell us they don't care a d--- for it—they ain't afraid of it."<sup>46</sup>

As this speculator knew, the southern position had emerged with great clarity and increasing unity across the South. Twenty years earlier congressmen representing the Upper South were wary of supporting the domestic trade because of its troublesome aspects. By the mid 1830s, they were willing to accept it as fundamental to their society. In doing so, they denied the validity of earlier southern questions about speculation. Southerners were convinced that times had changed and that northerners were now going to hammer away at the slave trade in order to undermine slavery's support. James Birney, who moved out of the South to oppose slavery, thought that abolitionists had a "very injurious" effect in the South. They furnished "a kind of justification of slavery itself to the Southern slaveholders."<sup>47</sup> Southerners assumed that any attempt to meddle with the buying and selling of bondservants, even in the District of Columbia, was the first step on the road to abolition. The slave trade, then, had to be protected and southerners rallied to resist federal interference with slavery. One southern newspaper wondered how anyone could support Martin Van Buren after one

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 719 (quotation), 723.

<sup>46</sup> *Liberator*, 20 Apr. 1838, p. 61.

<sup>47</sup> Dwight L. Dumond, ed., *Letters of James Gillespie Birney 1831-1857* (New York, 1938), 1: 90.

of his papers attacked the Washington trade. It pointed out that the South could not afford to lose too many political battles and still hope to protect servitude.<sup>48</sup> A European visitor realized what was at stake. He thought that all southerners had “an interest in protecting this infernal trade of slave-driving” because the expansion—and the future—of their society depended on it. Those who wanted to preserve slavery had to be willing to defend all of its aspects, even something as ugly as the interstate slave trade. They were willing to justify speculation’s horrible features in order to erect a comprehensive defense of their peculiar institution. As southerners did so, especially in the Upper South, they modified their beliefs about slavery. It no longer had any flaws because admitting weakness would open the door to even more northern denunciation. All negative aspects of slavery had to be blamed on those who were outside the mainstream of society.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, it was increasingly difficult to defend slavery and maintain an opposition to the slave trade. The *Western Luminary*, in deploring masters who sold their slaves to speculators, did not want level indiscriminate accusations. Some of the “best citizens” of the South held slaves, but did so in accordance with the “principle of humanity and justice.” These owners showed that it was not necessary to deal with slave traders. The paper also made it clear it was not in league with abolitionists. “Far be it from us to assert in the language of a certain class in some section of our country,” the *Luminary* explained, “that human beings can never under any circumstances

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<sup>48</sup> *Woodville Republican*, 9 Mar. 1839.

<sup>49</sup> Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion through the Slave States*, p. 37.

whatever, be held to bondage.” The chorus of extremism drowned out voices of moderation like this one.<sup>50</sup>

More typical was the position of William Haile, who ran for state representative in Mississippi on an openly anti-abolitionist platform. He realized that it was useless to differentiate between slavery and the slave trade. Haile accused seminaries and anti-slavery societies of conspiring to “destroy the domestic institutions of the South.” Campaigning in the aftermath of the Turner revolt, Haile pledged to keep Mississippi open to all slave importation. He ticked off a number of reasons why a law restricting the entry of slaves should be opposed: it would only help the large slaveholder, it would be evaded, a similar law in Louisiana failed, it would reduce immigration, and too many legal restraints demoralize a community. Haile thought that as “long as slavery is recognized, it cannot be restrained without a violation of right.” Interference with the slave trade was the first step to limiting the rights of slaveholders, according to this view.<sup>51</sup>

Defenders of the slave trade used tactics beside just blaming abolitionists for the interstate slave trade. Another popular defense was claiming that speculation’s effects were exaggerated. If apologists for the slave trade could demonstrate that it was of relatively minor importance in the South, then they would effectively rebut abolitionists’ claims of cruelty. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, speaking in South Carolina, recognized this essential point. He knew that outsiders described the slave

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<sup>50</sup> *Western Luminary*, 23 Nov. 1831.

<sup>51</sup> *Woodville Republican*, 10 Oct. 1833.



trade as “an outrage on humanity.” They were wrong. The sale of slaves was “often attended with beneficial effects” and the “improvement of their condition is the probable consequence.” In Pinckney’s view, the “separation of near relatives seldom takes place except by their own desire.” In those rare cases where slaves were forced apart, they were better off than the working class of the North, who “often encounter more real perils and hardships, than are to be found in the romantic catalogue of the horrors of slavery.”<sup>52</sup> Judge Harper covered much the same ground in his four part defense of slavery. The second installment of the series concerned itself mostly with disproving the alleged evils of slavery. Harper trotted out a list of crimes committed against slaves: no legal protection, excessive labor, cruel punishment, no opportunity for moral or intellectual advancement, marriage was essentially equivalent to concubinage, and families were torn apart. He then proceeded to disprove each assertion. Most of the charges were distorted, he thought, especially since worse things happened in a free society. The relation of the master to the slave was naturally one of kindness, so there was more tenderness than brutality. Harper did admit that slaves were “liable” to be sold, but charged that free laborers were separated from their families more frequently. Besides, Harper continued, the “native character and temperament” of bondservants made the separation “much less severely felt.” Harper’s awkward defense of the slave trade was really not much of a defense at all. Things in

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<sup>52</sup> *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 6 Sept. 1829, p. 66 (quotations); Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, p. 72. Pinckney also gave advice for slaveholders. He thought masters needed to improve the religious state of their slaves in order to gain the “advantage in argument over...our Northern Brethren.”

the North were worse, he argued, so northerners should focus their crusading energies on themselves rather than torturing the South.<sup>53</sup>

Central to this forceful defense of the slave trade and, by extension, slavery, was the issue of whether the movement of bondservants was subject to the interstate commerce clause of the Constitution. Northerners who wanted to regulate the trade insisted that the federal government could legislate the matter. Southerners admitted no such thing because they wanted no interference in the master-slave relationship. It was a delicate subject. The justification of slave sales hinged upon the assumption that slaves were property. The Constitution, however, gave the federal government the authority to regulate interstate commerce. Southerners were trying to have it both ways in denying and affirming the property nature of slave ownership. This dual approach to property rights helps explain the peculiar southern stance on the interstate slave trade and on speculators. One newspaper admitted as such when it admitted that slaves were “in the nature of commodities” but argued that they should not be regulated because the rights of ownership supersede any commercial implications. Constitutional issues aside, selling slaves for “removal” to the Southwest was “connected with the wealth and prosperity of the entire south.” Impeding this movement would hinder “the consequent increase of wealth [and] important elements of political power.” The slave trade was vital to expansion, which was essential for the maintenance of slavery.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “Judge Harper’s Memoir on Slavery,” *Southern Literary Journal*, Feb. 1838: 81-97.

<sup>54</sup> Undated *Charleston Patriot*, as quoted in *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 19 Sept. 1835, p. 39.

Southerners asserted, moreover, that most bondservants willingly took part in the interstate slave trade. This notion not only put masters' motives and actions in the best possible light, but also presented the elaborate system of interstate trading as a voluntary migration of slaves. Two ideas were at work here. First, the emphasis on migration countered the abolitionist attack on slavery's cruelty. If slaves were voluntary participants in the trade, then exposés revealing speculators' cruelty were shams. There was no reason to question slavery because if the most objectionable aspect was acceptable, then the whole system was benign. Secondly, if slaves willingly moved to new territory, then they could not be articles of commerce. There was no need to abolish or regulate the interstate slave trade because the bondservants moved voluntarily, were well-treated, and experienced improved material conditions as a result of sale.

The thorny issue of regulating interstate commerce came to a head in a Supreme Court case. As we have seen, Mississippi was in the unenviable position of constitutionally prohibiting the interstate slave trade even while taxing it. Governor Charles Lynch warned the legislature in 1837 that this contradictory position "opens the door to litigation." Besides forestalling lawsuits, Lynch hoped to steady a shaky economy by keeping money in Mississippi. The legislature responded by passing a bill that imposed penalties on those who imported slaves. It also declared all notes subsequently arising from the trade to be null and void.<sup>55</sup> The legislature acted too late,

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<sup>55</sup> *Woodville Republican*, 21 Jan. 1837 (quotation); *Richmond Enquirer*, 16 May, 19 May 1837; Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, p. 167; Drake, "Constitutional Development in Mississippi," pp. 182-83. Vidalia, Louisiana, just across the river from

since the damage was already done. When the panic of 1837 hit with full force, creditors scrambled to collect debts. Slave traders were one of the hardest hit groups because they held promissory notes that now had little or no chance of being paid. Speculators tried to force payment, but Mississippi's high court ruled that state citizens could not collect money from fellow residents.<sup>56</sup>

An earlier decision in federal court took a similar position. In *Hickman v. Rose*, a federal court ruled that all contracts for the sale of slaves in Mississippi since May of 1833 were illegal, and thus null and void.<sup>57</sup> Bacon Tait, a slave trader in Richmond, feared for his financial future. Inability to collect his notes would make it difficult to secure financing for the next slave trading season. He also wondered what would happen to the country. Tait thought the court's decision would "accelerate the crisis between the North & the South which has been so long anticipated and most probably will produce a dissolution of the Union." The federal government, in his opinion, was

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Natchez, became a popular site for slave purchases since Mississippi residents could bring slaves into the state for their own use.

<sup>56</sup> Bacon Tait to Rice C. Ballard, 14 Oct. 1840, Ballard Papers; Meredith Lang, *Defender of the Faith: The High Court of Mississippi, 1817-1875* (Jackson, Miss.: 1977), pp. 54-55; Helen T. Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases concerning American Slavery and the Negro*, 5 vol. (Washington, 1926), 3: 289-90. Two cases, *Green v. Robinson* and *Glidewell v. Hite*, affirmed this decision. These decisions prompted Isaac Franklin to change his residency. He briefly established it as Louisiana so he could sue for debts, but in so doing gave his wife a foothold in her 1850 suit for possession of his estate. She argued that Franklin was not a citizen of Tennessee, so she should retain possession of their house in Sumner County, contrary to Franklin's will (*Succession of Isaac Franklin*, pp. 255-56).

<sup>57</sup> *Niles' Weekly Register*, 1 Feb. 1840, p. 368; Undated *Newark Sentinel*, as quoted in *Liberator*, 3 Jan. 1840, p. 2.

“subservient to non-slaveholders since it could now rule *slaves are not property*.”<sup>58</sup>

These cases had enormous significance for the Mississippi economy and for the rest of the South, as well. Should the courts rule against them, then slave traders may just as well write off all of their debts in Mississippi. A negative ruling had the potential of destroying many speculators and crippling even more. A Natchez newspaper estimated that nearly ten thousand slaves were sold in Mississippi in the twelve months after November 1, 1835. Their value was at least ten million dollars.<sup>59</sup>

The speculators, however, were not willing to casually write off their debts; they went to court. Robert Slaughter imported slaves into Mississippi in 1836 and sold them for notes totaling \$7,000. He sued when he could not collect. This case, *Groves v. Slaughter*, became a collaborative effort on the part of several traders to recover their money.<sup>60</sup> Besides Walter Jones, the traders hired the “Ajax and Achilles of the bar,”

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<sup>58</sup> Bacon Tait to Thomas Boudar, 1 Jan. 1840, Bacon Tait to Rice C. Ballard, 3 Jan. 1840 (quotations, emphasis in original), Ballard Papers.

<sup>59</sup> Undated *Natchez Courier*, as quoted in *Liberator*, 12 May 1837, p. 78. The same issue quoted the opinion of an unidentified New Orleans paper that the potential loss by depreciation of slave property could bankrupt the state. Henry Clay, while arguing the case before the Supreme Court, said it involved three million dollars (*Groves, et al. v. Slaughter*, 40 U. S. (15 Peters), p. 481).

<sup>60</sup> Background for the case can be found in Boston *Massachusetts Spy*, 24 Feb. 1841, clipping in Carl Swisher Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C; Charles Warren, *The Supreme Court in United States History*, 3 vol. (Boston, 1922), 2: 342-46; Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter, eds., *A History of the South*, vol. 5, Charles Sydnor, *The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819-1848* (Baton Rouge, 1948), pp. 246-47; Paul A. Freund, ed., *The Oliver Wendell Holmes Devise History of the Supreme Court*, vol. 5, Carl B. Swisher, *The Taney Period, 1836-64* (New York, 1974), pp. 365-69; and Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, pp. 165-68. That several traders participated in the suit is clear (Bacon Tait to Rice C. Ballard, 9 May 1841, Ballard Papers).

Henry Clay and Daniel Webster.<sup>61</sup> United States Attorney General Henry D. Gilpin and Mississippi Senator Robert J. Walker opposed Clay, Webster, and Jones. On February 12, 1841 the week-long case commenced. Since it involved “most important consequences and some millions of dollars of property,” not to mention the presence of such prominent attorneys, it “excited general interest” around the country. Crowds, which included a “large proportion of well-dressed ladies,” packed the courtroom to hear the “great display of argument and eloquence.” The case’s surprising length pushed back the starting date for the celebrated *Amistad* case, next on the court’s docket.<sup>62</sup>

The court had a number of issues to decide. Most obviously, it had to rule whether the Mississippi constitution was a ban in and of itself or whether it needed prohibitory legislation to become effective. John Quincy Adams, who listened to the case while preparing to argue for the *Amistad* slaves, thought the *Groves* case turned on “whether a State of the Union can constitutionally prohibit the importation within her borders of slaves as merchandise.”<sup>63</sup> Southerners extended the issue even further and saw the case as a test of state sovereignty. One newspaper feared for the future should the court rule against state authority. In that case, states could no longer protect

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<sup>61</sup> *Groves v. Slaughter*, pp. 449-517, i-lxxxviii (quotation on p. 477).

<sup>62</sup> Undated *Baltimore American*, as quoted in Washington Niles’ *National Register*, 20 Feb. 1841, p. 400 (first quotation); Allan Nevins, ed., *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851*, 2 vol. (New York, 1927), 19 Feb. 1841, 2: 523 (second quotation); *Charleston Southern Patriot*, 4 Mar. 1841 (third quotation).

<sup>63</sup> Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of his Diary from 1795 to 1848*, 12 vol. (Philadelphia, 1876), 19 Feb. 1841, 10: 427.

themselves against “the fell abolitionists...whose fanaticism would provoke every species of excess against our laws and institutions.”<sup>64</sup> The court also had to address the question of whether slaves were persons or were articles of commerce. This area could cause enormous difficulties. Should the court rule that slaves were not articles of commerce, then it could be argued that bondservants were persons and the interstate slave trade infringed on their constitutional rights.<sup>65</sup> If the court ruled that slaves were property, then it could deem that they were subject to the interstate commerce clause. Southerners had reason to fear such a decision. Abolitionists had already signaled their intentions to oppose the interstate slave trade whenever possible, and a ruling favorable to them would probably unleash a renewed attempt to regulate the trade to the point of extinction. The *Richmond Enquirer* sensed the danger. It felt the case involved the “right claimed by Abolitionists, for Congress to prohibit the transportation of slaves from State to State.”<sup>66</sup>

Once the case began, Clay, Webster, and Jones argued that Mississippi’s constitutional clause was no prohibition in itself, being merely a suggestion rather than a directive. Since it was not a prohibition, purchasers could not contest sales on the grounds of illegality. Clay forcefully argued that “no one questioned the right to introduce slaves for sale” after the constitution took effect. It was only during difficult economic times that it became convenient to avoid debt because hard-pressed

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<sup>64</sup> Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, 26 Jan. 1841.

<sup>65</sup> The Groves case anticipated many of the same issues as the Dred Scott case, especially whether or not slaves were persons, or at least had the rights of citizens.

<sup>66</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, 9 Apr. 1841.

Mississippi residents would be less willing to honor such contracts.<sup>67</sup> More importantly, Clay accused the plaintiffs of being on the “abolition side of the question” when it came to the regulation of interstate commerce. He tried to establish that Mississippi’s prohibitory clause superseded the United States Constitution. “Regulation,” in Clay’s words, “implies continued existence.” The abolitionists were trying to “prevent the exercise of this commerce. This is a violation of the right of Congress under the Constitution.” Although Clay argued that Mississippi’s constitution was not effective in this case, he felt compelled to prevent the possibility of the federal government asserting its authority in this area. He flatly stated that “to deny the introduction of slaves, as merchandise, into a state, from another state, is an interference with the Constitution of the United States.”<sup>68</sup> Clay’s argument was “splendid,” according to one observer. “He connected it a little with the popular topic of abolition, intimating that his view of the question was the anti-abolition view.”<sup>69</sup> Webster took a slightly different tack. He did not uphold Clay’s view but carefully separated slavery and the slave trade. Webster argued that the United States Constitution “recognizes slaves as property,” but Congress had the “power and duty to regulate commerce between the states.” It could not, though, interfere with state regulations as to slavery.<sup>70</sup> The statements of these eminent statesmen show just how far apart the North and the

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<sup>67</sup> Groves v. Slaughter, p. 482.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 488 (first quotation), 489 (second quotation).

<sup>69</sup> *Charleston Southern Patriot*, 4 Mar. 1841.

<sup>70</sup> Groves v. Slaughter, p. 495.



South were by 1841. Clay described slave trading as a constitutional right while Webster felt the federal government could regulate speculation.

Walker swept past these considerations in his rebuttal, a statement that ably elucidated the aggressive southern defense of the interstate slave trade. His argument, which was too lengthy to include in the case description, endeavored to prove that interstate commerce in slaves was purely a state issue even while establishing that bondservants were property. Walker combined legal reasoning, political argumentation, and emotional appeals into an effective statement of why the interstate trade must remain a state issue and not a federal one.<sup>71</sup> He quickly clarified why a southern state would prohibit something it desperately wanted to preserve. It was, Walker explained, a matter of self defense. He claimed that the “unscrupulous negro-trader” was responsible for “the introduction of slaves from abroad of depraved character.” Such men “have offended against the majesty of laws and the sovereignty of the people of Mississippi; they have put in jeopardy the lives of our citizens, disregarded our cardinal policy, and trampled under their feet the sacred prohibitory enactments of the constitution.” The state and not the federal government, he explained, was in the best

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<sup>71</sup> The publisher printed Walker’s argument in an appendix. His position came directly from the Mississippi Supreme Court judge’s ruling. That Walker made political appeals is inferred from the situation in Mississippi. The Democrats urged Walker to run for Senator in 1839 and much of the campaign involved the national bank. His attack on banks as being heartless in the *Groves* case fits neatly with his pronouncements during the campaign. The fact that he was indebted for several hundred thousand dollars because of slave purchases also influenced his statements (*Groves v. Slaughter*, p. ix; James P. Shenton, *Robert John Walker: A Politician from Jackson to Lincoln* (New York, 1961), pp. 27-30; Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi*, p. 166).

position to decide how to deal with such evil. In this explanation, Walker relied on the stereotype of itinerant traders that had become widespread in the South.<sup>72</sup>

Lest northerners use this argument as a means to indict southerners for allowing speculators to run rampant, Walker carefully explained why the slave trade existed. Significant numbers of slaves in the Upper South had been “indoctrinated for years on the principles of abolition, surrounded with its teachers and stimulated by revenge, to diffuse their emancipating creed among our slave population; to render them forever dangerous, worthless, sullen and discontented, and to excite successive insurrection from time to time within our limits.” Such slaves spread their deadly creed to others, forcing owners to sell rebellious bondservants to traders. According to Walker, the primary reason that the South tolerated speculators was that they were necessary to defuse the instability caused by abolitionists. The South was “united,” he said, in “abolishing as states the inter-state slave trade.” Should the abolitionists cease their agitation, then the interstate slave trade would hardly be necessary. Walker repeated one of the key components of the slave trade defense: masters were not to blame for the interstate slave trade. Speculators, even though reduced to a stereotype, were not at fault either. It was the abolitionists who caused the South’s problems. The southern argument in favor of the interstate trade had come full circle. In the eighteenth century the South blamed England for foisting slavery upon the colonies. By 1840 the South blamed northern agitators for one of slavery’s worst features.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Groves v. Slaughter, pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp. lv (second quotation), lvi (first quotation). Walker explained that slaves contaminated by the “doctrines and principles of abolition” were found in the

Walker strengthened his position by exploring the master-slave relationship.

Southerners treated their slaves like persons, he explained, so they had scant inclination to use the interstate slave trade. The idea that “slaves are merely chattels and not persons” was a “radical error, and one that has been too long circulated uncontradicted by the abolitionists.” Walker explained how the master-slave relationship was “reciprocal under the laws of the south; the right of the master is to the services of the slave for life, and the right of the slave as secured by law, to humane and proper treatment, to comfortable lodging, food and clothing, and to proper care in infancy, sickness and old age.”<sup>74</sup> His disgust with the description of slaves as “chattel” reflects southerners’ dislike for the term, especially because of its frequent use by abolitionists. The argument about whether bondservants were treated like persons or like chattel went to the heart of the slavery controversy since it would be hard to attack a benign type of servitude. Southerners did all they could to disprove northern assertions that slaves were no more than property.

Slave owners’ aversion to being accused of treating their slaves like chattel was reflected in the opinions of John Hartwell Cocke. He held moderate views on slavery

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“counties of Maryland, Virginia and Kentucky, bordering for more than a than a thousand miles upon the adjacent states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois.” It would be “most dangerous to permit slave traders to drive them” to Mississippi (*Ibid.*, p. lvi).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. lv (first quotation), lvi (second quotation). Walker described slavery as “a relation of perpetual pupilage and minority, and of contented dependence on the one hand, and of guardian care and patriarchal power on the other, a power essential for the welfare of both parties.” Since southerners treated slaves as persons, he added, it would be foolish to contend that bondservants were subject to federal regulation (*Ibid.*, p. lv).

but was perturbed by the agitation over the issue and took it as a personal affront that abolitionists described slaves as chattel. Cocke thought that such language demeaned and cheapened the master-slave relationship. In an essay entitled “Negroes not Chattels,” he argued that using the word chattel to describe slavery was deceptive. Cocke thought it an “adroit slander” and an insult, since chattel implied that masters cared only for the property rights of their slaves and slighted the Christian belief that slaves had souls. He thought the “ultra-abolitionists of the North” were stirring up trouble with their insistence that slaves were chattels.<sup>75</sup> Walker’s argument echoed these thoughts and took them one step further by accusing abolitionists of treating slaves as chattels. Only “that party in the north that demands of congress to regulate the slave trade among the states, not really with a view to prohibit that traffic, for it is prohibited by the slave-holding states, but with an ultimate view to emancipation” wanted slaves to be considered only to be property.<sup>76</sup>

Walker’s argumentation reflected the southern mentality that masters did not want to admit they thought of their slaves in commercial terms. The interstate slave trade was the epitome of treating slaves in such a fashion since, by its very nature, speculation was concerned with the value of the slave rather than his or her character. This notion was the most difficult one for southerners to defend or explain away, especially in light of the abolitionists’ efforts to portray slavery in the worst possible way. If slaves were not treated as chattel, then congressional authority to regulate

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<sup>75</sup> John Hartwell Cocke, Sr., “Negroes not Chattels,” Undated essay, Cocke Family Papers.

<sup>76</sup> Groves v. Slaughter, p. lv.

commercial power was inapplicable in this case. For Walker, and others who tried to justify the presence of the interstate slave trade, it was essential to defy the very nature of the transaction. They blamed all others—banks, debt, abolitionists, the slaves themselves—for the slave trade because to admit their own culpability would be to undermine the whole basis of their society. Owners prided themselves on the benevolent care of their slaves, but speculation contradicted this illusory vision. In explaining away the interstate slave trade, and defying its essential commercial nature, Walker and other southerners relied on a defense of slavery where owners were concerned with the welfare of their slaves, not profit. If others were at fault for the trade, then southern qualms about speculation became a non-issue.

Although Walker had fashioned a worthy defense of the slave trade, he spent several hours arguing that the federal government had no authority in the matter. He did so even though Clay and Webster explicitly made the same point. In harking back to John Randolph's objection to the forty ton rule of the coastwise trade, Walker argued that regulation of the slave trade would give congress the power "*to regulate slavery*, both in and among the states. It is abolition in its most dangerous form, under the mask of a power to regulate commerce." Walker wanted to make sure the door was shut tightly against any federal meddling with slavery. He boldly proclaimed that the power to regulate interstate commerce "rests in congress alone" but if that body chose to legislate the interstate slave trade "in defiance of state authority, then indeed, we shall have reached a crisis in the abolition controversy, most alarming and momentous." He warned the Supreme Court not to get involved in the question because no one can

“predict the consequences.”<sup>77</sup> The likely result would be federal authority running roughshod over state control. Free states might find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having the federal government make slavery uniform throughout the entire country. Although this line of reasoning might seem absurd, Walker was trying to scare off those who did not want to see the further spread of slavery. He wanted the court to consider slavery “the unquestionable power of a state, and over which congress has no control or supervision.”<sup>78</sup> He rested his assertions on the bedrock of state authority rather than on federal control. In the final analysis, Walker’s defense of slavery and the slave trade encapsulated the essential southern position. He attached protection of the slave trade to a vigorous assertion of states’ rights.<sup>79</sup>

The court rendered its verdict on the day before it ruled on the *Amistad* case, and both decisions had the potential to cause much friction between slaveholding and free states. By a margin of five to two, it upheld the circuit court’s decision and ruled that statutory legislation was necessary before the constitutional ban took effect. More importantly, and in a major victory for the South, the court specifically directed that

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. li. (first quotation, emphasis in original), xlix (subsequent quotations).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. li. Walker warned that such a power would not only “oppress the slave-holding states,” but would “recoil upon the free states with a force and power which was little dreamed of by the abolitionists” (Ibid., p. lix).

<sup>79</sup> Several years later in the Senate, Florida Senator James Westcott described Walker’s statement as “never excelled by any made in that Court for masterly ability, profound learning and accomplished eloquence.” (James Westcott, as quoted in Warren, *Supreme Court*, 3: 343). John Quincy Adams had a different opinion. He remarked that Walker’s argument “sounded to me like the justification for the constitutional authority to prohibit it [slavery] in all the States, and for the exercise of it.” (Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, 19 Feb. 1841, 10: 427).

Congress possessed no power to regulate the interstate slave trade.<sup>80</sup> Three of the justices had slightly different slants on the ruling. In oral comments, John McLean thought states could outlaw slavery and prohibit the entry of bondservants. He flatly stated that the “power over slavery belongs to the states respectively. It is local in its character, and in its effects.”<sup>81</sup> Chief Justice Roger Taney left no doubt as to his personal opinion. The power over the interstate slave trade lay “exclusively with the several states” and Congress could not affect state action.<sup>82</sup> Roger Baldwin, who was ardently anti-slavery, could not keep quiet either. He differed from his colleagues in believing that “slaves were embraced by the Constitution as the subjects of commerce and commercial regulations.” Even so, Baldwin asserted the authority of the states to legislate slavery. He agreed with Walker’s contention that federal regulation of the interstate slave trade could eventually have deleterious effects on the free states.<sup>83</sup>

Bacon Tait rejoiced at the decision. He wrote Ballard that because of the decision, “you will ere long be enabled to collect all that is due to you in the S<sup>o</sup> West.” Ballard certainly greeted the news with joy, but was less enthusiastic when he received Henry Clay’s bill. Clay, disappointed at not being paid, guaranteed his services. He

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<sup>80</sup> Groves v. Slaughter, pp. 496-517; *Washington Globe*, 27 Mar. 1841 clipping in Carl Swisher Papers; Swisher, *Taney Period*, pp. 367-69. During the court’s term, Justice John Catron became ill and Justice Philip P. Barbour died, so only seven justices decided the case.

<sup>81</sup> Groves v. Slaughter, pp. 503-8 (quotation on p. 508). McLean added that the Constitution considered slaves to be persons even while states could consider them as property.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 508-10 (quotation on p. 508).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 510-17 (quotation on p. 514).

told Ballard he would refund the money if any other case overturned the decision.

When Ballard still refused to pay, Clay successfully sued for four thousand dollars.<sup>84</sup>

Tait, the other speculators, and southerners in general had good reason to be happy.

The *Groves* decision effectively neutralized efforts in Congress to regulate the interstate slave trade. The *Richmond Enquirer*, forgetting that it was a split decision, called for abolitionists “who respect the unanimous opinion of the Supreme Court” to “abandon so much of their petitions as call on Congress to regulate or prohibit the transportation of slaves from State to State.” This part of the “Abolition controversy,” the paper felt, had been “solemnly settled in favor of the South.”<sup>85</sup> The paper was too optimistic.

Opponents of slavery did not abandon the fight, but concentrated their efforts on the District of Columbia. They ultimately succeeded, of course, in having the trade banned in the District. Their victory was a hollow one, since most of the slave sales took place in Alexandria anyway. Southerners probably realized they could compromise on the District in 1850 since they now had the weight of case law on their side in any debate about regulating the interstate trade between the states. Thomas Bayly of Virginia summed up the *Groves* case as discussing “the extent of the power of Congress over what is familiarly called the internal slave trade.” Most agreed, he thought, “the decision has tended greatly to put an end to the agitation growing out of it.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Henry Clay to Rice C. Ballard, 23 June, 6 July 1841, 4 July 1844, Ballard Papers.

<sup>85</sup> *Richmond Enquirer*, 9 Apr. 1841.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Bayly, as quoted in Warren, *Supreme Court*, 3: 341. Southerners seemed to be cognizant of the victory. Carter Harrison of Virginia, for instance,



Although defenders of the slave trade denied its ubiquity and their own culpability, they still needed to explain the presence of slave traders. After all, owners who had the best interests of their slaves at heart presumably would not sell to a speculator. Just as the qualms that many southerners had about dealing with traders were rapidly disappearing, there was an underlying need to preserve the fiction that most owners preferred not to sell their slaves to speculators. Southerners could not deny the presence of traders, so it became common to assert that they were rare and had contact with a relatively small number of bondservants. Those few speculators who did exist, the thinking went, were shunned from polite society and only survived because they duped a gullible public into buying their slaves. The argumentation of a southern minister illustrates this change in thinking about slave traders. During a debate in Cincinnati, N. L. Rice dealt with the issue of whether the slave trade was sinful. He shifted the blame for the trade by asserting that the “multiplication of slave-gangs” was “one of the sad effects of the doctrine and practice of abolitionists.” Opponents of slavery frequently deluded slaves into becoming discontented, he explained. Masters feared losing their slaves, so they “sell them to the hard-hearted trader.” Rice concluded that the speculator was “looked upon by decent men in the slave-holding States with disgust.” The trader was a necessary evil who was not a product of slaveholders’ greed but of northerners’ interference.<sup>87</sup>

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carefully copied a lengthy summary of the case and tucked it into his diary (Undated note in Carter H. Harrison Diary, University of Virginia).

<sup>87</sup> J. Blanchard and N. L. Rice, *A Debate on Slavery held in the City of Cincinnati* (Cincinnati, 1846), p. 28.

Walker, in his argument before the Supreme Court, also relied upon the stereotype of the unscrupulous trader. He said that speculators were engaged in an

inhuman traffic; transporting these slaves in chains from state to state, for the sole purpose of a sale for profit; desirous of increasing this profit by purchasing the cheapest slaves, which would always be the most wicked and dangerous, reckless of the moral qualities and character of the slaves whom they bought, not for their own use, but to sell for speculation; tempted to buy the most wicked slaves, because always to be purchased at the lowest price, and sold in a distant state at the highest price, to those who would be ignorant of their dangerous character; inured as these traders were to scenes of wretchedness and cruelty, and entirely regardless of the means by which they reaped a profit from this traffic.<sup>88</sup>

Blaming the trader was an easy way to avoid responsibility for slavery's abuses.

The trajectory of Southern attitudes appeared in the outpouring of southern literature in rebuttal to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, a novel that accused southern masters of destroying slaves' lives by indulging in their own selfish desires.<sup>89</sup> Stowe's book, and others like it, indicted every southerner for allowing the presence of slavery and the slave trade, something that systematically destroyed slave families and caused untold hardship. Southerners, however, forcefully answered this assault on their character. The novels that appeared in response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* defended slavery by explaining away the slave trader. Most of the plots in these books involved the sale, or near sale, of bondservants and thus digressed into a discussion of speculation's role in southern society. These stories routinely castigated the trader as an inhuman brute who made his money through exploitation of not only slaves, but also

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<sup>88</sup> Groves v. Slaughter, p. lxix.

<sup>89</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life among the Lowly*, 2 vol. (Boston, 1852).

unsuspecting whites. The evil speculator separated bondservants from their families and took them away from their kind and benevolent masters. In most cases, however, the upstanding citizens of the local community banded together to thwart the destructive designs of the traders. Just as importantly, northern fanatics were the cause of the trouble in the first place. Slaves would not dream of running away because they had it so good.<sup>90</sup>

J. Thornton Randolph, for instance, relied on melodramatic action and turgid prose to defend the peculiar institution. His book described the funeral of Mr. Courtenoy and noted the “loud and long lamentations” of his slaves when they learned of their master’s death. Soon, the firm of “Skin and Flint” from New York, which had long charged “usurious” interest rates to Courtenoy, moved in to collect its share of the estate. Courtenoy’s daughter, Isabel, was so noble, she was willing to take a job to raise enough money so that the “helpless” slaves would not be sold away from family members. Isabel was certain that her neighbors would not allow the separation of slave families, something that happened in novels but not “in real life, except in rare cases, or where the slave has been guilty of some misdemeanor, or crime, for which, in the North, he would have been imprisoned, perhaps, for life.” Circumstances, of course, work out for Isabel as her neighbors conspired to purchase the slaves. A trader

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<sup>90</sup> A discussion of this genre of literature is found in J. B. Tandy, “Pro-Slavery Propaganda in American Fiction of the Fifties,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 21 (1922): 41-51, 170-79; Francis Pendleton Gaines, *The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and the Accuracy of a Tradition* (New York, 1925); Herbert Ross Brown, *The Sentimental Novel in America 1789-1860* (Durham, N. C., 1940), pp. 241-80; Tracy, *In the Master’s Eye*; and Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 180-84. None of these works, however, makes the explicit connection between southern fears and northern abolitionists.

appeared at the sale, but “was hustled rather rudely by one or two present, so that, after making a few ineffectual bids, he thought it prudent to retire.” Randolph’s book had a clear message—the separation of slave families was a rarity and when it did happen, northerners were to blame. The slaves, moreover, were better off than northern workers. One of Randolph’s bondservants was so happy he refused emancipation because he could not bear to think of life without his master.<sup>91</sup>

The “classic in the antebellum genre of trader stereotyping” came from the pen of Daniel Hundley.<sup>92</sup> Writing during the secession crisis, he detected the presence of yankees lurking in the South. Hundley did not identify them by their ancestry or place of residence, but through their characteristics. In *Social Relations in our Southern States*, he noted that a yankee was any “shrewd, sharp, chaffering, oily-tongued, soft-sawdering, inquisitive, money-making, money-saving, and money-worshipping individual” who was tireless in his pursuit of riches. The most detestable type of southern yankee, in Hundley’s eyes, was the “Negro Trader,” a man “preeminent in villainy and a greedy love of filthy lucre...who is in every respect as unconscionable a dog of a Southern Shylock as ever drank raw brandy by the glassful, or chewed Virginia

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<sup>91</sup> J. Thornton Randolph, *The Cabin and Parlor; or, Slaves and Masters* (Philadelphia, 1852) pp. 21 (first quotation), 33 (second quotation), 34 (third quotation), 35 (fourth quotation), 39-40 (fifth quotation), 51. Other works that make essentially the same argument include Robert Criswell, “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” contrasted with *Buckingham Hall, the Planter’s Home, or a fair View of both Sides of the Slavery Question* (New York: D. Fanshaw, 1852); Mary H. Eastman, *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin: or Southern Life as It is* (Philadelphia: Lippincott and Grambo, 1852); J. W. Page, *Uncle Robin, in His Cabin in Virginia, and Tom without one in Boston* (Richmond, 1853); and Mrs. Henry R. Schoolcraft, *The Black Gauntlet: A Tale of Plantation Life in South Carolina* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1861).

<sup>92</sup> Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, p. 183.

tobacco, or used New-England cowskins to lacerate the back of a slave.” This “miserly” trader was “a coarse ill-bred person, provincial in speech and manners, with a cross-looking phiz, a whiskey-tinctured nose, cold hard-looking eyes, a dirty tobacco-stained mouth, and shabby dress.” Skilled in oaths and blasphemies, the trader’s only competitors in depravity were “those infidel socialists, free-lovers, and abolitionists.”<sup>93</sup>

Hundley admitted that some traders might have been honest when they entered the business, but “the natural result of their calling seems to be to corrupt them.” A trader routinely sold criminal slaves as honest and sick ones as healthy. In order to accomplish his purposes, he changed the appearance of his slaves. This trick was accomplished when he “dresses them up in good clothes, makes them comb their kinky heads into some appearance of neatness, rubs oil on their dusky faces to give them a sleek healthy color, gives them a dram occasionally to make them sprightly, and teaches each one the part he or she has to play.” These activities, coupled with the practice of habitually separating families, did not trouble the trader’s conscience, because “we all know how soon familiarity with ignorance and a vicious brutality tarnishes the characters of good men.” Hundley concluded that the continual exposure to the worst elements of the slave population dulled any pangs of guilt a trader may have experienced.<sup>94</sup>

Hundley’s stereotypical description of slave traders drew upon real objections to speculators. Traders *were* guilty of changing the appearance of slaves, coaching them

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<sup>93</sup> Daniel R. Hundley, *Social Relations in our Southern States* (1860; reprint Baton Rouge, 1979), pp. 130-41.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140-41.

on what to say, and being in the business for the purpose of making money. Hundley, of course, exaggerated the crimes of the slave trader for effect. He also created a caricature of the master-slave relationship in his efforts to explain away the speculator. One exaggeration could not exist without the other. A realistic portrayal of the slave trader necessitated a realistic assessment of slavery, something Hundley could not do. By making the slave trader the epitome of evil, Hundley, and the other southerners who agreed with him, saw slavery as being without blemish.

Slave owners needed the stereotype of the evil slave trader, moreover, to preserve their way of life. Southerners widely considered it “more humane” to keep bondservants’ families together than to wantonly separate them. Some owners might even have had good intentions when selling an entire family of slaves to a trader. But, as a traveler through the South observed, “such kindnesses are of no avail after the victims come into the southern markets” since traders did not hesitate to separate families.<sup>95</sup> It is unclear how sincere planters were in keeping families together, but even those owners who had no compunction about breaking up families did not boast in their deeds. Slave owners were quick to assure visitors that they had a “kind feeling” towards their “people.” Adverse public opinion, they continued, operated as a “powerful check against the parting of kindred.” Others made “Great sacrifices” from a sense of duty because owners thought it wrong to “abandon” slaves to an unknown purchaser.<sup>96</sup> Masters hardly had to worry about abandoning their slaves; most received

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<sup>95</sup> *Liberator*, 17 May 1834, p.77.

<sup>96</sup> Lyell, *Second Visit to the United States*, 1: 209-10.

ample compensation in their transactions. Southerners were able to convince some visitors, and themselves, that they had the best interests of their slaves at heart. A Philadelphia druggist was not fooled, however. He observed that the slave trade, although “frowned upon and called an ‘exceptional case’” was really “an essential and integral part of the system.” He thought that in private sales, families were less prone to be separated, but public auctions were another story. Callous slave traders found it in their interest to buy a whole family at a reduced price and then sell them separately to make a greater profit. Such practices were carried on to “an *enormous extent*” and there was no shortage of slave traders combing the countryside in search of “articles.” Public opinion “may be averse to tearing a husband from his wife, or a mother from her children, but it cannot be avoided.”<sup>97</sup>

The rhetoric of an evil slave trader enabled southerners to explain a problematic aspect of their society: the cruel treatment of slaves. Once speculators were to blame for the worst abuses of slavery, southerners could remain committed to the institution as a whole. Certainly masters were just as much to blame for the sale of slaves as traders. Most southerners, however, preferred not to consider the full consequences of the interstate slave trade because it did not conveniently fit the notions of their society. The reliance on a class of evil speculators that the South ritually condemned allowed slaveholders to evade blame for splitting up families, punishing slaves, or engaging in other objectionable acts that brought grief to their bondservants. The disagreeable portions of slavery that naturally flowed from the institution could be separated from

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<sup>97</sup> Francis C. Yarnall Diary, pp. 14-15, Duke. Emphasis in original.

the slaveholders and blamed on circumstances beyond the master's control: itinerant traders, northern meddlers, or slave traders. In this way, traders and abolitionists became responsible for the worst features of slavery, thus sparing slaveholders from having to shoulder any blame for the negative consequences of the peculiar institution. In the face of the personal nature of abolitionist criticism after 1830, southerners had a way to avoid personal responsibility. James Stirling, who traveled through the United States in the mid-1850s, believed that the interstate trade of slaves was "a sore subject with the defenders of slavery. It is difficult to weave it handsomely among the amenities of the patriarchal institution. They fain would make a scapegoat of the 'Trader,' and load all the iniquities of the system on his unlucky back."<sup>98</sup> All questions about the inhumanity or barbarity of bondage had a simple answer: abolitionists induced slaves to become rebellious, so owners had no choice but to sell them. Traders stepped in and took advantage of the situation. As a result, slavery was good, slaveholders acted responsibly and with the best interests of their slaves at heart, and the only unacceptable feature of southern society was the slave trader. Since speculators themselves were outcasts and devoid of honor, the argument continued, they remained at the periphery of society and were not important.

This stereotypical view of traders was linked, in southern minds, to northerners. Fanatical abolitionists induced slaves to run away, while ruinous economic policies caused hardship in the South, thereby necessitating the sale of bondservants in the first place. Southerners redirected abolitionist attacks on the peculiar institution by

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<sup>98</sup> James Stirling, *Letters from the Slave States* (London, 1857), pp. 292-94 (quotation on p. 292).



essentially saying northerners caused the worst abuses of slavery. As a result, there was no need to reform southern society or interfere with the rights of the master to sell his bondservants. Constructing a stereotypical view was one way to hold together a society increasingly under siege.

The southern defense of the interstate slave trade shows just how far southerners were willing to go to deny reality. They reduced the relationship between master and slave to a crude caricature, where the slaves were rarely separated from their relatives and the masters were more concerned with pleasing their bondservants than with financial survival. On the rare occasions where the slave trade intruded on this happy existence, it sometimes operated as rehabilitative force on those slaves who deserved to be sold because of their anti-social behavior. Citizens of the Upper South abandoned their initial reservations about the slave trade in favor of a completely unrealistic picture. Just as slavery was beneficial to bondservants, all aspects of the institution had to be free from defects, as well. There was no room for the troublesome reality of the interstate slave trade, so southerners substituted an idealized and stylized dream for the bitter reality of whippings, auctions, coffles, family separations, and personal anguish.

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## Vita

Robert Harold Gudmestad was born in Minnesota and grew up in the town of Windom. After graduation he enrolled in North Dakota State University where he earned his bachelor of arts degree in history. He worked as a Special Agent for the Immigration and Naturalization Service in St. Paul before earning his master of arts degree in history from the University of Richmond. That fall he enrolled at Louisiana State University where he completed his doctoral degree in history. He and his wife Beth have a son named Samuel.

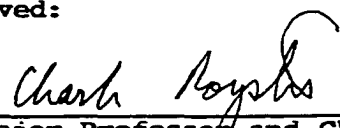
# DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

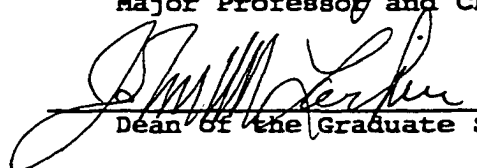
**Candidate:** Robert Harold Gudmestad

**Major Field:** History

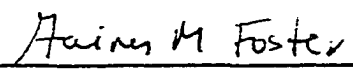
**Title of Dissertation:** A Troublesome Commerce: The  
Interstate Slave Trade, 1808-1840

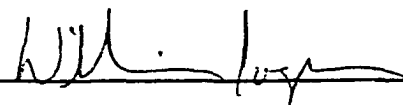
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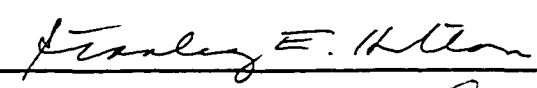
  
Major Professor and Chairman


  
Dean of the Graduate School

## EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

  
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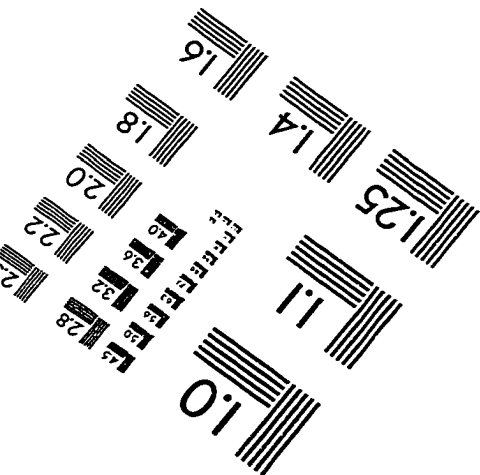
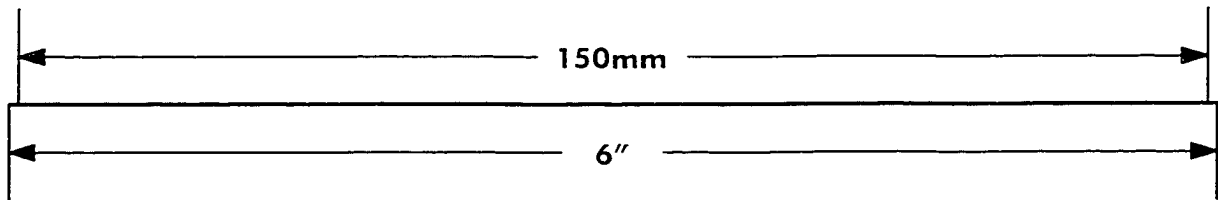
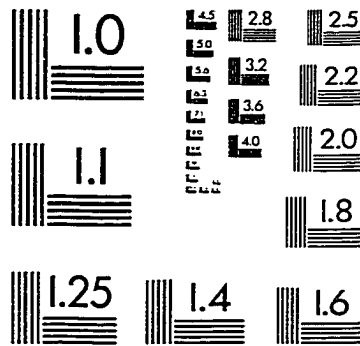
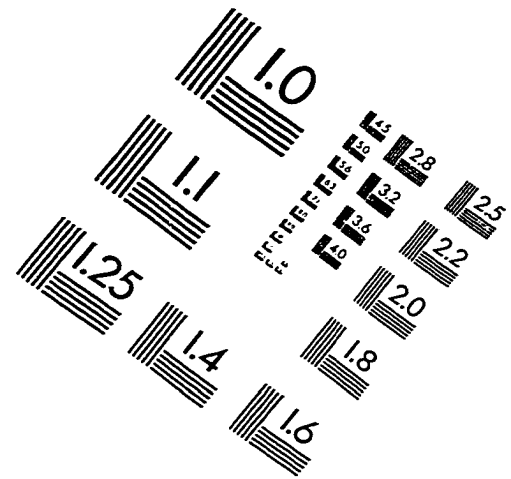
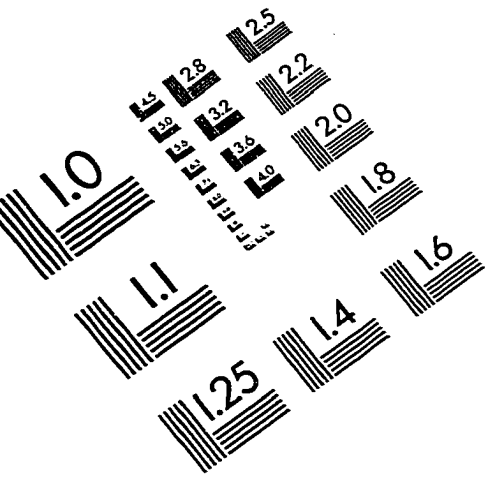
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